No 332 الاهرام ويكلي

Al-Ahram Weekly

Published in Cairo by AL-AHRAM established in 1875

3 - 9 July 1997 | 20 Pages | P.T.75



Newt Gingrich, portrait of the week by Bahgory 12

Staying away

THE PALESTINIAN Legislative Council decided to boycott US Independence Day celebrations on Friday in retaliation for a US congress vote recognising Jerusalem as Israel's capital. The boycott, the French news agency AFP reported, was also in protest "against US pressuring Palestinians to bend to Israeli demands in the peace process."

For the first time this year, Americans were planning to hold celebrations in Gaza City, as well as their usual festivities at the embassy in Tel Aviv and consulate in East Jerusalem.

At the UN headquarters, Nasser Al-Kidwa, the Palestine Liberation Organisation's UN observer, said the Arab states would request a resumption of the General Assembly emergency session to discuss Israel's settlement policy following a report that Israel had not abandoned its construction of a new settlement in south Jerusalem.

(see pp. 4&5)

High price

THE US may pay a high price for its support of Israel by losing out on a lucrative deal with Saudi Arabia, worth around $5 billion. Diplomatic sources in Dubai said Saudi Crown Prince Abdullah ibn Abdel-Aziz told US Defence Secretary William Cohen, during a recent visit to Saudi Arabia, that the US must stop giving the impression it is siding with Israel at a time when the US-sponsored peace process is deadlocked, AFP reported.

At stake is a deal to replace the Saudi air force's ageing fleet of more than 100 F-5 fighter planes. The F-16 fighter, made by US manufacturer Lockheed Martin, is the frontrunner to replace the F-5s, but it is competing with the JAS-39, built by Saab of Sweden, and the Rafale, built by Dassault of France.

The tension between Saudi Arabia and the US was aggravated by a Saudi decision not to attend the fourth Middle East North Africa Economic conference (MENA) in Doha, the capital of Qatar, next November and a visit by a senior envoy of Saudi Arabia's King Fahd to Tehran on Tuesday. *(see p.5)*

Lives at risk

THE UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) warned, at a meeting of donors in Geneva on Tuesday, that the future of a generation of Sudanese children is at risk. UNICEF urged the warring factions in southern Sudan to speed up efforts to end the civil conflict and provide it with unconditional access to the four million women and children it is trying to assist.

Reuters cited a study by the University of Khartoum which says that between 80 and 90 per cent out of a population of 26.7 million lives below the poverty line. Out of 1,000 live births, 115 children die before the age of five and child malnutrition ranges between 15 per cent in the north to 30 per cent in the south.

INSIDE



THE HEART OF FATIMID CAIRO is to be given a new lease of life as an ambitious scheme to renovate the area around Al-Azhar Square, and neighbouring El-Mu'izz Lidin Illah Street, gets underway, reports **Nevine El-Aref**. Sponsored by the Supreme Council of Antiquities (SCA) and other concerned governmental bodies, the scheme includes restoring the many monuments that line both square and street. "The idea is to turn this area into an open air museum of Islamic architecture," said Ali Hassan, secretary-general of the SCA.

The project began last year, when President Hosni Mubarak gave the go-ahead for a major restoration of Al-Azhar Mosque.

"We have been carrying out detailed surveys on the foundations of the mosque, which have seriously deteriorated over the last half century," said Ibrahim Mahlab, vice chairman of Arab Contractors, charged with implementing a major part of the scheme.

Work on the mosque is expected to be completed within a year, after which attention will be focused on Al-Azhar's administrative building. In an ambitious plan to pedestrianise the area, the administrative headquarters of the world's oldest university will be relocated to El-Darassa Square. The site of the existing building will then be converted into a public park.

Within a decade engineers and restorers hope to have transformed the crowded neighbourhood into a major international tourist attraction, showcasing some of the finest architectural monuments in the Islamic world.

photo: Randa Shaath

Peace progress at hand

During a visit to Toshka on Tuesday, President Mubarak said he expected progress in Palestinian-Israeli negotiations within 10 days. **Nevine Khalil** reports

Palestinians and Israelis are putting their heads together behind closed doors to try and find a way to relaunch the frozen peace process, drawing on ideas formulated in Cairo, according to Egyptian diplomats. And although Egypt's diplomatic initiative appears to have stalled temporarily, it may be re-activated sooner than expected.

President Hosni Mubarak meets with Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat in Cairo today to take stock of the situation. But Egyptian officials have kept a tight lid on the current status of their diplomatic efforts, saying that media coverage could undermine the possibility of progress.

A top Egyptian diplomatic source told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that an Egyptian five-point plan was on the table. The proposal requires Israel to halt all settlement activity for a reasonable period of time to allow for a resumption of negotiations between the two sides and bars any unilateral action that would change the status of Jerusalem until the city's future is decided in final status negotiations. The plan also calls for the immediate start of the final status negotiations as well as Israel's complete implementation of the Hebron redeployment agreement. In return, the Palestinian Authority would fully cooperate in meeting Israel's security needs.

The source said that European modifications of the Egyptian plan which Miguel Moratinos, the European Union's envoy, carried were no longer under consideration. The European proposals were designed to make the Egyptian plan more acceptable to the Israelis.

The source also said that the US administration has not put forward any new ideas, and was fully supportive of Egyptian efforts. He brushed aside a non-binding US Senate resolution on moving the US Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem and the attempts of a US Senate subcommittee to scrap American aid to Egypt. The subcommittee's action will be reversed, in all probability, by the US Senate.

Answering questions put by the *Weekly*, Mubarak said the Jerusalem resolution was "not a wise decision. It is going to make the situation much more inflammable" because of the Holy City's sensitive status. Regarding the possibility of a cut in American aid Mubarak said: "If they want to reduce it, let them do it. I have no problem." But Mubarak noted that Egypt has "very good friends in the Senate who understand Egypt's position in this part of the world and its importance to the peace process".

Responding to a statement by the subcommittee's chairman, Senator Mitch McConnell, that Jordan deserves a $250 million reward in economic and security aid because of its superior performance in the peace process, Mubarak said that McConnell should "remember that Egypt is the country which [unlocked] the peace process ."

The president said that Egypt, having put the Palestinians and Israelis on the right track, would not make any moves in the immediate future.

"We opened the door and we'll let them negotiate," said Mubarak, adding that both parties have had "some contacts" over the past few weeks, although he would not divulge their content. "I hope they conclude something within a week to 10 days," he said.

According to press reports, a "secret channel" of talks between the PLO's top negotiator Mahmoud Abbas and Israeli Defence Minister Yitzhak Mordechai, closely monitored by the US and Egypt, may soon result in agreement on the opening of an airport in Gaza and a "safe passage" between Gaza and the West Bank. The agreement, expected within two weeks, would come ahead or coincide with the resumption of Palestinian-Israeli negotiations. Abbas also met with Israel's right-wing hawk Ariel Sharon two weeks ago to test extremist waters within Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu's government.

Mubarak made the statements during a two-hour tour of the Toshka Desert reclamation project in the southwest of the country.

(see p.2 for more details)

'Collective suicide'

Netanyahu held talks with David Levy yesterday in an attempt to resolve the crisis that is paralysing his government. The results, writes **Graham Usher** from Jerusalem, are far from certain

One week after Israel's Likud-led coalition narrowly survived a no confidence vote, Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu has yet to announce the cabinet reshuffle which will confirm whether or not Ariel Sharon will replace Dan Meridor as Israel's next finance minister. The cause of the current impasse is less the threat of parties from the coalition lining up with the opposition than a crisis of faith between Netanyahu and his truculent Foreign Minister David Levy.

Netanyahu and Levy held talks yesterday in an effort to end the political quarrel that shook the government. It was their first confrontation since the disgruntled foreign minister threatened on Monday to quit over the way the government was run.

In the aftermath of Meridor's resignation, Levy and the five Knesset members from his Gesher Party had made their support for the reshuffle conditional on Netanyahu fulfilling certain economic pledges to Israel's poorer development towns (where Gesher draws its main support) and on Levy being granted overall responsibility for negotiations with the Palestinians and Syria. More generally, Levy complained that he had been excluded from important diplomatic moves, such as the Allon-Plus plan mooted by Netanyahu last month as the possible basis of a final settlement with the Palestinians.

Levy met with Netanyahu twice last week to agree on terms for Gesher's ongoing participation in the coalition. In the meetings, Netanyahu reportedly promised to apprise Levy of all matters pertaining to the peace process. On 27 June — within hours of Levy's second meeting with Netanyahu — Israeli television broke the news that in mid-June Sharon had met secretly with chief PLO negotiator Mahmoud Abbas. Netanyahu, who sanctioned the meeting, had forgotten to tell his foreign minister about it. Levy was furious. "I have no trust in Netanyahu," he said on 29 June.

But neither has Levy tendered his resignation. Most Israeli commentators agree that Levy has now lost all patience with Netanyahu's leadership. But they also agree that neither he nor Gesher are prepared to bring down the government, and also themselves, in a vote of no confidence.

Although Levy has no objection to Sharon being appointed finance minister, it appears he does have a problem with Sharon joining the government's so called "political-security" or kitchen cabinet — made up of Netanyahu, Levy and Defence Minister Yitzhak Mordechai — which exercises exclusive authority over Israel's foreign and negotiation policies. Rather, "it is healthier to involve the entire cabinet in these decisions," says Levy. Sharon has predicated his acceptance of the finance portfolio on the kitchen cabinet being preserved and on himself becoming a member.

The result of this debacle is paralysis at the highest levels of Israeli government and a growing sense that the end of Netanyahu's coalition is near. On 30 June, Internal Security Minister Avigdor Kahalani, accused the government of committing "collective suicide" and announced that his Third Way movement was readying itself for early elections. It is a view shared by Israel's Labour and Meretz opposition parties.

Although some Israeli (and Palestinian) commentators have posited the meeting with Abbas as evidence of a new "pragmatic" Sharon, others see the rapprochement as tactical. Sharon met with Abbas one day after he was offered the Finance Ministry and kitchen cabinet post. Sharon's sudden zest to talk with Abbas — who is viewed by Israel as representing the most "moderate" wing of the Palestinian leadership — is thus more likely to do with political aspiration than penitence for his hawkish past.

There is no evidence to show that Sharon's settlement ambitions in the Occupied Territories have changed in favour of a just settlement with the Palestinians. It is rather that — like Netanyahu — Sharon has come to the conclusion that, under Oslo, these ambitions must be pursued in "negotiation" with the PLO rather than at war with it.

Fresh clashes in Hebron

ISRAELI snipers perched on rooftops fired live rounds at Palestinian demonstrators in the divided West Bank city of Hebron yesterday as they faced a deluge of stones and firebombs. Meanwhile, Arab shopkeepers closed their premises in protest over anti-Muslim leaflets distributed by a Jewish extremist.

Six Palestinians, injured in the clashes, received treatment at a makeshift clinic — an ambulance, a stretcher and two nurses — set up in a nearby gas station.

Two of the rioters, including a 12-year-old boy, were wounded after being shot in the legs by live bullets, according to Palestinian doctors. Another four were injured by rubber-coated steel pellets.

The renewed violence was triggered by a Jewish extremist who posted caricatures insulting the Prophet Mohamed on Arab shops in Hebron over the weekend.

Yesterday's commercial strike in Hebron was supported by shopkeepers elsewhere in the West Bank and Gaza, many of whom decided to close their businesses for an hour.

The Israeli woman who distributed the anti-Muslim leaflets is, according to police reports, to be indicted today.

Also in Hebron, Israeli troops yesterday bricked up an alley where two soldiers were wounded a day earlier by a home-made bomb thrown from a rooftop by a Palestinian. Palestinian protesters later tore down parts of the wall. Meanwhile, in Gaza, Israeli soldiers shot and killed a Palestinian youth protesting settlement activity in Gaza.

Maher Abdel-Menem Assar, 18, was shot in the heart by a live bullet and died after arrival at Shifa Hospital in Gaza City, sources at the hospital said yesterday.

Step by step towards a New Delta

Construction work on a New Delta is proceeding efficiently and punctually six months after president Mubarak gave the starting signal. **Nevine Khalil** reports from Toshka

On Tuesday, President Honsi Mubarak visited the Toshki area in the southwestern desert — construction site of what has been called a New Delta — for the third time since he signalled its start by pushing a detonation button on 9 January. The multi-billion pound project, including a 238km-long irrigation canal, is relying mainly on private sector investments. Over the past six months, a number of Egyptian, Arab and other foreign companies have expressed readiness to take part in the project which will increase Egypt's inhabited area from five to 25 per cent of its total area.

Following a series of short briefings, made by Prime Minister Kamal El-Ganzouri and several cabinet ministers, Mubarak reviewed the steps taken in construction, land reclamation, mineral discoveries, industrial, infrastructure and tourism projects.

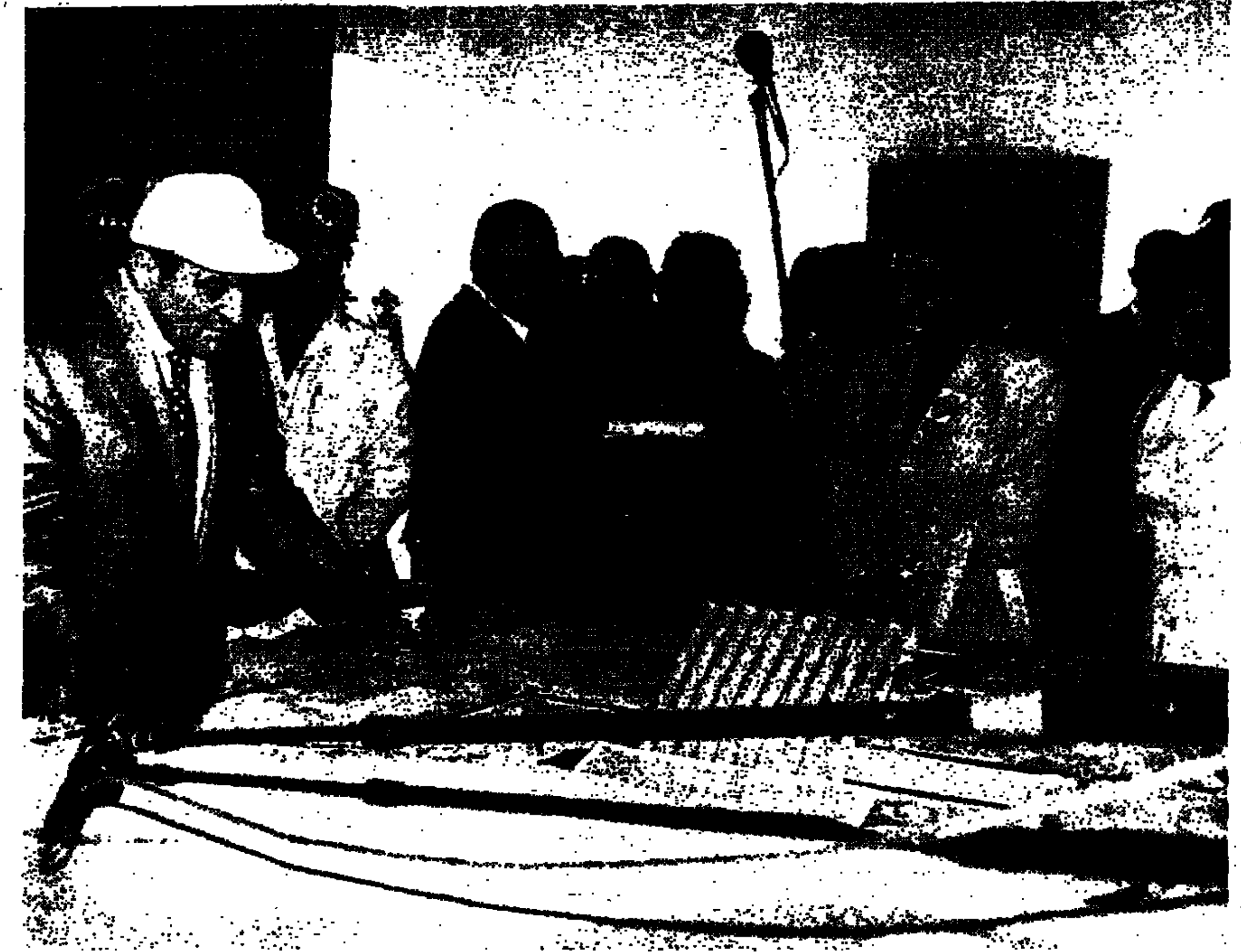
"We have initiated a new civilisation here and we look forward to a Greater Delta in the South of the Valley," El-Ganzouri told an audience of nearly 250 guests, adding that it would have been "very short-sighted" to think that the population would remain confined to the narrow strip of land along the banks of the Nile.

Mubarak interrupted the briefing to emphasise to the gathering that "this project will not be finished within a few years, maybe it will take 15 or 20," adding that progress will be made "according to our resources and abilities." He continued that the New Delta is a serious endeavour, not something created to please public opinion, and it should be "executed correctly, step by step with no great leaps."

Wearing casual clothes, sunglasses and an assortment of hats, ministers, public figures, actors, businessmen and journalists made a quick tour of two sites under construction. The first was a giant water pumping station and the second the initial part of the irrigation canal. The president was treated to concise briefings at the two sites. 'Keep it short and to the point' was the order of the day as the hot sun scorched the surrounding desert. As a result of heat and humidity, work at Toshki stops between midday and early afternoon. Labourers instead work at night under floodlights, when the weather is far cooler than the average 52 degrees centigrade daytime temperature.

According to the chairman of Al-Beheira Holding Company, the contractors in charge of construction, work over the past six months has progressed ahead of schedule. "I hope we stay that way," added Mohamed El-Ghitani, referring to the 13km-long section of the irrigation canal which remains to be dug, to complete the 30 kilometre-length of the first phase. His company has already dug out almost as much earth and stones as were removed for the entire Aswan High Dam project. By next September, workers will begin coating the canal with a mixture of sand and cement, then add a layer of insulator and another of concrete.

Fouad Abu Hadab, adviser to Minister of Agriculture Youssef Wali, said that over the past four decades Egypt has had a great deal of experience with land reclamation. Therefore, the project, which aims at the greening of half a million feddans of desert land in the first phase alone, is watertight.



Mubarak looks at a scaled-down model of the construction site during his two-hour tour of Toshka

Peace avenues kept open

Cairo does not appear ready to give up on its diplomatic initiative to salvage the peace process, but diplomats say they are waiting for a sign of flexibility from Israel. **Dina Ezzat** looks at the diplomatic scene

The current crisis in the Israeli cabinet has threatened to stall Egyptian efforts to bring the Palestinians and Israelis back to the negotiating table. Nevertheless, Egyptian diplomats say they have good reasons for pressing ahead with the Egyptian initiative, despite the delay of a planned visit to Israel by presidential adviser Osama El-Baz, originally expected this week. According to the diplomats, the visit has been postponed while Cairo awaits a sign of flexibility from Israel.

Mohamed Bassiouni, the Egyptian ambassador in Tel Aviv, told *Al-Ahram Weekly* in a telephone interview that "the Egyptian initiative has made two main achievements to date." The first, he said, is that both sides have become fully aware of the other's bottom line. This clear understanding should allow more realistic thinking about ways of salvaging the peace process, which came to a halt after Israel began building a Jewish quarter in Arab East Jerusalem in mid-March.

This mutual understanding of each other's position opened the way for the second achievement. "Both parties have now moved from talking about generalities and procedural matters to the substantial issues that could really make a difference," Bassiouni said.

"The Egyptian and Arab stance is very clear about the fact that there can be no negotiations while Israeli bulldozers are eroding and eating up the Palestinian land, which is itself the subject of the negotiations," Bassiouni added.

Earlier this week, Israeli cabinet minister Ariel Sharon held a secret meeting with Mahmoud Abbas, one of Yasser Arafat's top aides. "The two sides explained their basic positions on the resumption of negotiations, but nothing much was achieved," a source told the *Weekly*.

Osama El-Baz had been expected to visit Israel and the Palestinian self-rule territories this week in a fresh round of shuttle diplomacy aimed at narrowing the gap between the Palestinians and Israelis. But the visit was re-scheduled for next week "or even later." Israel put the delay down to its own cabinet crisis. Egyptian Foreign Ministry sources told the *Weekly* that the visit had been tentatively scheduled for last Monday or Tuesday, but the timing was never confirmed, because it "depended on some sign of flexibility from the Israelis. So far, Cairo has not received such a sign," one source said. If El-Baz does not go to Israel, some senior Israeli official may come to Cairo, the sources added.

Egyptian diplomats concede that the impact of Cairo's initiative has been limited, but they say Egypt has reasons to go on trying. The first is that both the Palestinians and Israelis have declared that they want the Egyptian initiative to continue. A second reason is that Cairo feels it has a moral obligation to play a part in securing a fair deal by which the Palestinians regain their legitimate rights in line with the land-for-peace formula. As one diplomat put it: "What the Palestinians are getting by virtue of the Oslo Accords is the minimum; it would be very unfair to let them face a situation where they would have to make even more concessions."

The third reason for Cairo to forge ahead with its efforts is that they represent an attempt to keep the peace process afloat, even in the face of overwhelming odds. "If the worst comes to the worst and [Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin] Netanyahu keeps aiming blows at the peace process, Egypt wants to make sure that the peace is not buried so that the next Israeli government could pick up the pieces on the Palestinian and other tracks," a Foreign Ministry source said.

This does not mean that Cairo has given up hope of the Palestinians and Israelis reaching agreement while Netanyahu is still in power. "It is true that Netanyahu was elected primarily to achieve security, but he was also elected on a peace ticket," the source commented.

Bassiouni agreed, pointing out that Netanyahu's problems with his cabinet and a large section of his people "is partially due to his failure to realise the peace that he had promised his people, along with security."

Eye on the watchers

A human rights activist says the policy of his US-based group linking foreign aid to respect for human rights applies equally to both Egypt and Israel. Joe Stork spoke to **Khaled Dawoud**

A member of the Washington-based Human Rights Watch/Middle East, who ended a visit to this country last week, has denied that his organisation is biased against Egypt or other Arab countries. Joe Stork, an American lawyer, insisted that his group's main concern was adherence to internationally recognised human rights conventions and standards.

Stork was visiting Egypt for meetings with officials and representatives of local human rights organisations as part of an effort to monitor human rights in this country.

A colleague who was supposed to have joined Stork on the visit was barred from entering Cairo, allegedly for carrying literature sharply criticising Egypt's human rights record in his luggage.

Gamal Abu Ali, who holds dual Jordanian-Canadian nationality, presented his Jordanian passport to airport officials, who allowed him through passport control. "The trouble started when his bags were searched and customs officers found human rights literature inside," Stork told *Al-Ahram Weekly*.

A security official, speaking on condition of anonymity, confirmed that Abu Ali had been denied entry and put on a flight to Paris. The official added that Abu Ali's luggage contained several books and reports which were very critical of Egypt's human rights record. Stork maintained, however, that the only literature Abu Ali was carrying was "brochures explaining what Human Rights Watch is as an organisation."

Stork said that the Egyptian authorities had been informed in advance of his and Abu Ali's arrival in the country. The two men had requested appointments with the interior minister, the justice minister, the prosecutor-general and the head of the Human Rights Department at the Foreign Ministry, to raise concerns over alleged human rights violations in Egypt. The two men were also planning to meet representatives of local human rights groups who provide information on violations in Egypt to international organisations.

Stork said Abu Ali was particularly interested in investigating the reported deaths of five or six Islamist militants in police custody. According to Stork, none of them are recent cases; the one that has attracted most publicity is that of Islamist lawyer Abdel-Harith Madani who died in police custody in 1994. The prosecutor-general has been considering a complaint filed by Madani's family and lawyers claiming that he died as a result of torture, but no announcement has yet been made concerning the complaint. The Interior Ministry said that Madani, who officials claim was in poor health, died of natural causes.

Stork said that he did not manage to secure any appointments with ministers or the prosecutor-general, but was able to meet Naela Gabr, head of the Human Rights Department at the Foreign Ministry. He added that he had filed a complaint with the Foreign Ministry for refusing entry to Abu Ali. He also contacted the Canadian Embassy, as Abu Ali holds a Canadian passport. The embassy sent a diplomat to the airport, who confirmed that Abu Ali had been deported.

Human Rights Watch defines itself as a "non-governmental organisation established in 1978 to monitor and promote the observance of internationally recognised human rights in Africa, the Americas, Asia and the Middle East." It issues annual reports on the state of human rights in nearly all countries of the world.

The group has a strong influence in the United States. Members are usually invited to provide testimonies at Congressional hearings concerning foreign aid, in which they are asked whether countries receiving American aid are committed to basic human rights.

Human Rights Watch/Middle East has been very critical of Egypt. In the past, it has even gone as far as urging the White House and Congress to cut off the annual $2.1 billion aid package for Egypt because it does not meet what the group considers as "internationally recognised human rights standards."

This position has not only angered the Egyptian government, but also local human rights groups, who warned Human Rights Watch officials that adopting such a policy would harm bilateral relations and further complicate the local groups' activities, which are currently tolerated but not legally recognised by the government. Middle East Watch has also been accused of bias towards Israel; avoiding the critical language used in connection with Egypt, Syria and Iraq, and ignoring the rights of Palestinians living under occupation.

Stork, who presented his group's latest testimony on the human rights situation in Egypt to the US House of Representatives Committee on International Relations on 10 April, told Congressmen that "economic concerns clearly preoccupied the US administration in its relationship with Egypt in 1996 more than human rights, and key US officials on a number of occasions praised economic reform while the crucial need for political reform was unmentioned."

While not directly calling for an end to US aid to Egypt, Stork nevertheless urged Congressmen to "make clear, in Congressional hearings and in meetings with Egyptian officials in Cairo and in Washington, that persistent and recurrent violations of human rights negatively affect the depth and quality of a country's relations with the United States."

Stork told the *Weekly* that his organisation's call for linking American foreign aid with respect for human rights on the part of recipient countries did not only apply to Egypt. He said his group had urged the US administration to apply the same policy to Israel.

He was, he added, personally involved in a project aimed at contacting all European foreign ministers involved in ratifying the European Union-Israel Association Agreement, and urging them to "pursue such ratification in a careful manner that addresses recurrent Israeli human rights violations." Letters were sent to the French, Dutch, Danish, Irish and British foreign ministers, asking them to express their concern over human rights violations committed by Israel against Palestinians. He also provided members of the European Parliament with reports on Israeli human rights violations ahead of a debate of the EU-Israel Association Agreement.

Middle East Watch has also provided reports on Tunisia and Morocco when their association agreements with the EU came up for discussion. "We will do the same with Egypt, of course. But the point is that we are not biased against any particular country," he said.

In addition to its regular reports on human rights violations in the occupied Palestinian territories, Human Rights Watch/Middle East has issued other reports criticising Israel's treatment of the Lebanese residents of its self-proclaimed security zone in southern Lebanon. "We also publish reports criticising human rights violations in the United States," Stork said, denying that his group was concerned with human rights abuses worldwide while severe violations against its own ethnic minorities were ignored.

Resolution condemned

ARAB Information Ministers, concluding a two-day conference in Cairo on Sunday, condemned as "racist" a US Congress resolution urging the relocation of the US Embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem.

The ministers said in a statement that the resolution, which is not binding on the Clinton administration, "aims at Judaising the holy city, gives the Israeli government free rein to plunder more Palestinian land and encourages it to continue its intransigence and defiance of the resolutions of international legality."

The ministers urged cooperation with UNESCO, through the establishment of an international fund, to preserve the "human heritage" in Jerusalem.

Tantawi outraged

SHEIKH Mohamed Sayed Tantawi, the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, said on Monday that anybody who insults the Prophet Mohamed should be put on trial and condemned to death.

In statements published by the Arabic-language press, Tantawi said that "anybody who insults the Prophet Mohamed, whether by means of words, pictures or any other form of expression, should be tried fairly and in a way that will deter others... The legal verdict is death because, by insulting the Prophet, the offender has insulted the Islamic religion. The punishment for anybody who does that deliberately is death, if they are proven guilty and if the offender does not repent."

Posters insulting the Prophet Mohamed were pasted earlier this week on the walls of the West Bank city of Hebron. A suspect, Jerusalem resident Tatyana Suskin, was remanded in custody for five days by an Israeli court.

Sabbahi's custody extended

DESPITE an appeal by the Press Syndicate for the release of journalist Hamdin Sabbahi, State Security Prosecutor Hisham Saraya on Sunday ordered him to be remanded in custody, along with three others, for an additional 15-day period.

Sabbahi, two lawyers and a veterinarian, all leftists, were arrested on 17 June for allegedly participating in a solidarity campaign with tenant farmers who were protesting against the threat of eviction under a new landlord-tenant relationship law.

The four were charged with "resorting to terrorism to oppose the state laws," inciting farmers and disturbing the peace. They denied the accusations.

The four have filed a complaint with Attorney-General Raga'a El-Arabi claiming that they were stripped of their clothes in a prison cell, beaten and whipped by police guards.

The Press Syndicate's council, in a statement on Sunday, appealed to prosecution authorities for Sabbahi's release on the grounds that the case against him "is a case of [freedom of] expression." The council said it was "highly disturbed" by the alleged police brutality, affirming that "any defendant is entitled to fair and legal treatment, particularly in cases related to [freedom of] expression." The council warned that "allowing this crime to go unpunished would undermine the credibility of the civic society institutions" and tarnish their image and principles.

And yet the council welcomed the attorney's decision to investigate the complaint, refer the four for a medical examination and move them to another prison.

Interior Minister Hassan El-Alfi also ordered the complaint investigated.

Rioting in Minya

TENANT farmers fearing eviction once a new tenant-landlord relationship law comes into effect clashed with security forces in the southern province of El-Minya on Tuesday, starting fires and cutting off the highway connecting Cairo with southern Egypt, reports **Ahmed Moussa**. Three civilians were killed and two others injured in the clashes.

An Interior Ministry source said farmers at the village of El-Tawfiqiya in the Samallout district rioted and opened fire on the police forces who arrived to restore order. The forces fired back, and as a result, a 70-year-old man and a four-year-old child were killed.

At another village, Al-Kawadi in the Matay district, farmers hurled stones at public buses, started fires and cut off the road connecting Cairo with southern Egypt for an hour and a half. In ensuing clashes with security forces, a 20-year-old woman was killed.

Mansour Essawi, the governor of El-Minya province, visited the two villages to calm the farmers down, affirming that the state was taking measures to ensure that the interests of neither tenants nor landlords would be harmed.

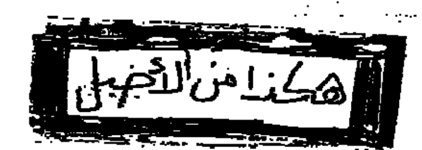
Smuggling attempt foiled

POLICE on Sunday arrested a customs official suspected of attempting to help two smugglers ship a box of Pharaonic antiquities to Europe, using documents that claimed the package belonged to a US diplomat working in Cairo.

The 210-kilogram package contained a sculpture of the head of Pharaoh Ahmose V and glass plates that are more than 3,000-years-old, airport officials said.

The plan was uncovered after police received information that an Egyptian and an Egyptian-American were planning to send antiquities to Geneva in a box with forged US Embassy documents. The smugglers had tried to disguise the antiquities shipment as the personal effects of a Cairo-based American diplomat.

After obtaining the permission of the Foreign Ministry and written consent from the American Embassy, the box was opened and the antiquities seized. The customs official was arrested and he named his accomplices.



Lawsuit preacher slammed

Islamist preacher Youssef El-Badri, who spearheads a campaign to intimidate intellectuals by bringing lawsuits accusing them of being anti-Islamic, has suffered a major setback in court. **Khaled Dawoud** reports

A Cairo court has thrown out a libel suit filed by Islamist preacher Youssef El-Badri against the weekly magazine *Rose El-Youssef* and instead fined him LE20,000 for using slanderous language in presenting his case.

El-Badri, a former member of parliament, is well known for his lawsuits against artists and intellectuals whose work he considers anti-Islamic. He sued the magazine for an article published in 1995, which described him as an extremist who opposes art and creativity. The article cited the lawsuits he had initiated against artists, novelists, actors, actresses, film directors and intellectuals, accusing them of violating the teachings of Islam and urging the courts to ban their work. He asked Cairo's Southern Court for LE100,000 in damages.

The court not only ruled against Badri, but also ordered him, together with five other Islamist lawyers who had co-sponsored the action, to pay *Rose El-Youssef* LE20,000 for insulting the magazine and claiming that it aimed to spread anti-Islamic ideas.

Monday's ruling was the first major setback for Badri, who has managed to win several court orders muzzling freedom of expression in recent years.

Judge Hassan Khomeis, explaining his decision, lashed out at Islamist groups, describing them as an "epidemic," and urging the government to confine them to mental hospitals until they are able to adjust their ideas to modern life. He said the Islamists were hungry for power, had attempted to replace God as a judge on people's conscience and curtailed the freedom of thought and expression.

Only last week, a triumphant El-Badri celebrated winning an administrative court ruling reversing a Ministry of Health decree banning the practice of female genital mutilation in public and private hospitals and clinics. The ruling, which appeared to support El-Badri's view that the practice is required by Islam, brought a stream of protest from human rights groups and feminists.

El-Badri

Two years ago, El-Badri also managed to win an order from the Court of Cassation divorcing university professor Nasr Hamed Abu Zeid from his wife on the grounds that his writings revealed him to be an apostate. Under Islamic law, a non-Muslim cannot be married to a Muslim woman. The ruling was later suspended by another court, but Abu Zeid and his wife, university lecturer Ibtihal Yunis, remain in self-imposed exile in the Netherlands, fearing for their lives after threats from militant groups.

Nobel prize winning novelist Naguib Mahfouz was also targeted by El-Badri. The Islamist preacher sued the 85-year-old writer because of a novel, published in 1959 and later banned by Al-Azhar.

In all his cases, Badri cites an article in the Egyptian Constitution which states that Islam is the main source of legislation. He argues that, as a result, Islamic rules should prevail.

The fact that several courts have ruled in favour of El-Badri and his extreme views has worried human rights activists and secular intellectuals, who became suspicious that some judges had embraced the extremist ideology. But Judge Khomeis hit back at the extremists in a long and outspoken explanation of his ruling.

"Egypt has been hit by the epidemic of religious extremism, represented by a few psychologically sick people whose sickness has led them to imagine that God has given them His powers in punishing and rewarding others," Judge Khomeis said.

"God alone is entitled to punish and reward, and God has never allowed one human being to control another or to judge whether the actions taken by other human beings were right (*halal*) or wrong (*haram*)."

Khomeis noted that although the government has succeeded in curbing militant violence in recent years, "religious extremists remain nearly everywhere in Egypt, in every street and alley, interfering openly in other people's affairs."

"The government should gather all these [extremists] and confine them to mental asylums to treat their sick souls and their absent minds... before they are allowed to re-join society as productive and healthy people," he wrote in the explanatory note of his ruling.

He accused the militant groups of "seeking backwardness and a return to the dark ages for this people, and shackling freedom with the chains of their reactionary and extremist views."

The judge affirmed that "freedom is the basis of life. The free human being creates, invents, acts and teaches others, but a human being whose freedom is restricted is closer to animals than human beings. Those extremists want, with their sick ideas, to turn this people into a herd of sheep who are driven to serve their sick designs.

"*Rose El-Youssef* magazine confronted these self-appointed guardians of the whole nation, roaming the streets of Cairo examining cinema posters and searching the newspapers and magazines for people to sue and warnings to make, threatening and terrorising people and interfering in their affairs."

The extremists, Khomeis said, "were seeking to drag justice into supporting them and their backwardness, but justice is annoyed with their position because human freedom should remain above everything else."

El-Badri told reporters that he would appeal the ruling. He added that he was confident of winning his next lawsuit, against the education minister, demanding the removal of a text criticising female circumcision from a primary school curriculum.

New lawsuit against Mashhour


Mashhour

A second Coptic lawyer is taking legal action against the Supreme Guide of the outlawed Muslim Brotherhood for questioning the loyalty of Copts. **Ahmed Moussa** reports

Naguib Nassif, a Coptic lawyer, has filed a lawsuit against Mustafa Mashhour, supreme guide of the illegal Muslim Brotherhood, accusing him of defaming and slandering Copts and demanding LE10 million in compensation. Nassif based the legal action on an interview with Mashhour, published by *Al-Ahram Weekly* on 3 April, in which he said that, if an Islamic state were established, Copts should be made to pay an annual tax, known as *jizya*.

He also argued in the interview that Copts should be barred from the army because their loyalty would be questionable if Egypt came under attack from a Christian state. Mashhour later attempted a retraction of his statements.

Nassif is the second Coptic lawyer to initiate legal action against Mashhour. Shortly after the interview was published in April, Mamdouh Nakhla filed a lawsuit, also accusing Mashhour of defamation for questioning the loyalty of Copts and labelling them as potential traitors.

Nassif's case will be heard by the Misdemeanours Court in the Cairo district of Ain Shams, where Mashhour lives, on 1 September. Nassif told the *Weekly* the LE10 million he is demanding in compensation should be placed at the disposal of the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, who should have a free hand in disbursing it to serve the activities of Al-Azhar and the Coptic Church.

Nassif said the Mashhour interview had done a disservice to national unity and was a violation of law and social order. "By insisting on *jizya* and the barring of Copts from the armed forces, Mashhour has branded Copts, including myself, as traitors and hirelings of the enemy, who are not qualified to defend themselves and their homeland," he explained.

Mashhour, Nassif added, has ignored the patriotic role played by Copts in the 1919 Revolution against the British occupation. The six Wafd Party leaders who were exiled by the British to the Seychelles included two Copts, and seven others condemned to death by the British colonial administration included four Copts, he said.

Copts also fought alongside Muslims in all the wars against Israel, and Pope Shenoudah has ruled that Christians must not enter Jerusalem except hand-in-hand with Muslims, Nassif said.

The Mashhour interview "is a national, and not merely sectarian, sedition, because Mashhour knows well that Islam is a religion of equality, justice and mercy and deals with people as equals," Nassif said.

Accusing Copts of being potential traitors is penalised by law, and the fact that Mashhour is highly respected and looked upon as an authority by some sectors of society makes his offence all the more serious, Nassif added.

Star preacher denounces kidney transplants

A televised statement by a popular Muslim preacher opposing organ transplants has scared away donors and surgeons at a government-run kidney transplant hospital. **Shaden Shehab** reports

The appearance of the popular Muslim preacher Sheikh Metwalli El-Shaarawi on a television programme discussing the issue of organ transplants last week has added fuel to the ongoing debate about the religious rights and wrongs of transplant surgery. The ageing sheikh put forward his view that transplanting any human organs is against Islam, on the grounds that humans do not own their bodies, which are the property of God.

Shaarawi said that human organs should not be donated because only God has the prerogative of disposing of the human body as he pleases. To prove his point, the sheikh said that any person who commits suicide is considered an infidel because he acted as if he owned his body.

It was not a coincidence, Shaarawi said, that God gave man two kidneys. The reason, he argued, is that if a kidney stops functioning, the other would save the person's life. So, if a person donates one of his kidneys, and the other stops functioning later, he has condemned himself to death.

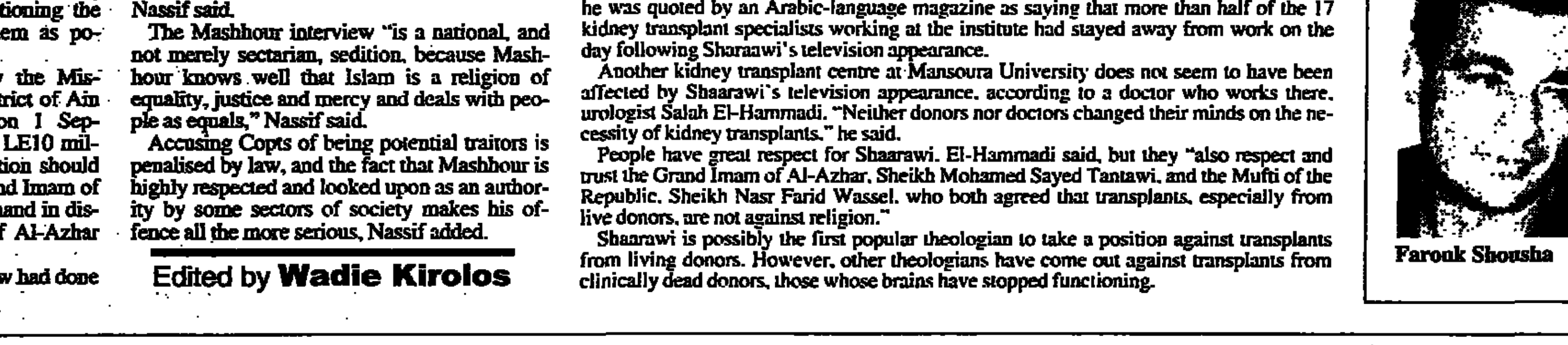
The sheikh's television appearance kept doctors and donors away from the Mattariya National Kidney Institute, a government-run hospital, where kidney transplants are carried out. An insider told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that some surgeons scheduled to perform kidney transplants had refused to carry them out on the grounds that they did not wish to do anything un-Islamic. Some would-be donors also changed their minds, the insider said, adding that kidney transplants are still being performed at the hospital, but on a smaller scale than before.

The head of the institute, Ibrahim Abul-Fotouh, could not be reached for comment. But he was quoted by an Arabic-language magazine as saying that more than half of the 17 kidney transplant specialists working at the institute had stayed away from work on the day following Sharaawi's television appearance.

Another kidney transplant centre at Mansoura University does not seem to have been affected by Shaarawi's television appearance, according to a doctor who works there, urologist Salah El-Hammadi. "Neither donors nor doctors changed their minds on the necessity of kidney transplants," he said.

People have great respect for Shaarawi, El-Hammadi said, but they "also respect and trust the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, Sheikh Mohamed Sayed Tantawi, and the Mufti of the Republic, Sheikh Nasr Farid Wassel, who both agreed that transplants, especially from live donors, are not against religion."

Shaarawi is possibly the first popular theologian to take a position against transplants from living donors. However, other theologians have come out against transplants from clinically dead donors, those whose brains have stopped functioning.



Edited by **Wadie Kirolos**

Awards well deserved

Intellectual circles looked approvingly on the decisions of the Higher Council of Culture in distributing the annual State's Merit and Incentive Awards. **Amira Howeidy** reports


Anwar Abdel-Malik


El-Sayed Yassin




Ghali Shukri

Ahmed Hamroush


Farouk Shousha

Eight writers, artists and social scientists won the 1996 State's Merit Awards this week for lifetime achievement, while incentive awards went to 10 others. Intellectual circles reacted positively to the decisions of the awarding committee.

Veteran poet, radio and television broadcaster Farouk Shousha, 62, won a Merit Award for literature. Also collecting a literature award was renowned literary critic Dr Ghali Shukri, also 62, who has written over 40 books of literature and literary criticism and attained prominence through his weekly political column in the London-based *Al-Watan Al-Arabi*.

The arts Merit Awards went to Mounir Kan'an, 78, artistic adviser to Akhbar El-Yom press organisation, and architect Ali Nour-eddin Nassar, who died recently at the age of 77.

The Merit Awards for social sciences went to El-Sayed Yassin, 64, Lewis Kamel Meleika and the late Mohamed Taha Badawi, as well as to Anwar Abdel-Malik, 72, who has written and edited more than 30 books in Arabic, English and French and undertaken research in Asia, Europe and Latin America.

Winners of the Incentive Awards included *Al-Ahram* literary critic Mustafa Abdel-Ghani, for his book about nationalism in the Arabic novel, and veteran journalist Ahmed Hamroush, for a book about the 1952 anti-monarchy revolution. Other Incentive Award winners were composer Rageh Dawoud, film editor Adel Mounir Boutros and Mohamed Fathi El-Rayes, for translation from a foreign language into Arabic.

Candidates for the Merit Awards are nominated by universities, the Arabic Language Academy and other literary and artistic institutions. Candidates for the Incentive Awards nominate themselves. The winners are chosen by the Higher Council for Culture, an affiliate of the Ministry of Culture. The council can give up to 10 State's Merit Awards and 18 State's Incentive Awards annually, depending on the number of candidates who receive the minimum number of votes required to win these prestigious prizes.

The Council announced three years ago that it was raising the value of the merit award from LE5,000 to 25,000, but the raise remains to be approved by the Ministry of Finance.

For Saadeddin Wahba, head of the Writers' Union, the distribution of the awards this year was "satisfying and agreeable". Reminded that the winners included no women, Wahba responded: "We have to consider the [small] number of women working in the fields of arts, literature and social sciences first before we accuse the Higher Council of Culture of deliberately ignoring them."

In the past some intellectuals charged that the awards usually went to writers and artists on good terms with officialdom and that women were deliberately excluded.

Mrs Farkhonda Hassan, a member of the Shura Council, agreed with Wahba that the distribution of the awards this year was fair. "The awards are determined by the achievements of the candidates, and we have to admit that until very recently not many women were active in the literary, artistic and social science fields," Hassan said. "The awards went to the people who really deserve them."

Only three times lucky for MENA?

Qatar insists it will go ahead with plans to host the fourth MENA conference despite strong Arab opposition. **Khaled Dawoud** investigates the effect of the stalled peace process on the *normalisation* of Arab economic ties with Israel

Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Abdullah bin Abdel-Aziz is the latest Arab leader to announce his country's opposition to the convening of the fourth Middle East and North Africa Economic (MENA) *conference, scheduled to be held in* Qatar in November.

After concluding the first tour of its kind in years by a Saudi official to both Syria and Lebanon last week, Prince Abdullah was quoted as saying that Riyadh has advised Qatar to cancel the MENA summit. "We told them this conference will harm them and we advised them that we and most Arab states will not attend," he told *As-Safir*, the Lebanese daily, at the end of his visit to Lebanon. "We advised them to drop this conference," he added.

Prince Abdullah's statements were the first to express clearly Saudi Arabia's view on the MENA meeting Qatar insists on hosting. Syria, supported by other Arab countries, calls for its cancellation due to the present deadlock in the Arab-Israeli peace process.

According to the Arab diplomats who attended the Damascus Declaration countries' meeting in Syria last week, the dispute over the MENA summit topped the agenda of the foreign ministers' discussions. A "heated argument" reportedly took place between Syrian Foreign Minister Farouq Al-Sharaa and Qatar's State Minister for Foreign Affairs Hamad bin Abdullah Al-Mahmoud. Qatari Foreign Minister Hamad bin Jassim Al-Thani did not attend the *meeting, according to Qatari officials,* because he had other commitments.

Although Syria, which boycotted the three previous MENA conferences, was openly lobbying the other Arab countries to support its call to cancel the Doha meeting, most Arab observers believe that the Saudi opposition will be the most influential in determining the final outcome. Saudi Arabia is the dominant and largest *country in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)*, which also includes Qatar, Kuwait, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates and Oman. If Saudi Arabia does not attend the meeting, other Arab countries, including those in the Gulf, are expected to follow suit.

Doha, for its part, said it is facing pressure from the United States to hold the MENA conference on time. Crown Prince Abdullah, in his *remarks published in Al-Safir* Monday, said Washington has also asked his country to take part. "We informed [the Americans] of our viewpoint. How can this happen when Jerusalem is being lost and swallowed? There is no way we can forget Jerusalem," he said.

Prince Abdullah added that he urged Qatari leaders to give Arab interests priority. "The *[Qataris] informed us that they are facing strong* pressure to hold [the conference] in Doha. So we said you must inform whoever is pressuring you that you have counter pressure from the Arabs. The emir of Qatar is a good man and we are hoping that he would meet the requests of his Arab brothers," Abdullah told *Al-Safir*.

Originally, MENA meetings were referred to as "economic summits." On the occasion of the summits held in Casablanca, Morocco, in 1994 and Amman, Jordan, in 1995, both King Hassan of Morocco and King Hussein of Jordan invited other world leaders to take part and the mood was upbeat. At the time, the view was that regional economic cooperation was one of the main tools to turn the existing peace agreements into reality. When Cairo's turn came to host the 1996 MENA meeting, however, the circumstances and rationale underpinning the conferences had undergone a radical change.

Former Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres, the godfather and architect of meetings aimed at encouraging cooperation between the Arab countries and Israel, had gone out of power. The right-wing Binyamin Netanyahu had replaced the so-called "moderate" Labour leader and Peres' project of a "Common Middle East Market", were already viewed with circumspection *by Arab leaders who feared an Israeli attempt to* establish economic hegemony over the region.

But the straw that broke the camel's back was the fact that Netanyahu quickly proved that the statements he made during his election campaign were not simple rhetoric, but his actual political programme. He made true his promises to refuse to honour the Oslo agreements with the Palestinians and to oppose the establishment of a *Palestinian state or withdrawal from Syria's* Golan Heights.

Therefore, the Arab leaders convened their first summit in six years in Cairo one month after Netanyahu's election and delivered a clear message to the new Israeli government: the normalisation of ties as previously agreed by the Arabs, whether bilateral or multilateral, is related to progress in the peace process. Thus, the *holding of Cairo's MENA meeting was put in* question, particularly as Netanyahu's provocative statements escalated into action when he opened the Jerusalem tunnel beneath Al-Aqsa Mosque.

At the time, Syria argued that the third MENA summit should not take place in accordance with the decisions taken at Cairo's Arab summit. Egypt, however, *felt that after five months in* power, there was still hope that Netanyahu would change and recognise the fact that the peace agreements reached with the Arab countries could not be reversed. Meanwhile, Cairo managed to administer skilfully the MENA conference in a way aimed at delivering the same message Cairo's Arab summit had sent to Israel. President Hosni Mubarak made it clear that MENA was an economic conference, not an economic summit. Invitations were delivered to foreign ministers and not to heads of state to downplay expectations.

At the conference itself, the Israeli delegation was shunned and most Arab countries and businessmen refused to sign joint deals with Israel until Netanyahu showed that he was ready to change his hardline policies in the peace process. Many of those who attended the meeting agreed that Egypt successfully turned it into an opportunity to market investment opportunities in Egypt to the hundreds of world businessmen who took part.

But after more than a year with Netanyahu in power, the situation has deteriorated further and the peace process reached its worst deadlock in years. Netanyahu did not only freeze the peace talks with the Palestinians and backtrack from *agreements already signed, but threatened the* basis of the whole peace process in March by announcing his decision to build a new Jewish settlement in Arab East Jerusalem and to expand settlements in all occupied Palestinian territories.

In response, the Arab foreign ministers who met at the Arab League last March decided to freeze the normalisation of ties with Israel and to revive the economic boycott against it. They also backed Syria *in its demand to restart negotiations* with Israel from the point where they stopped under Peres' government. This decision was approved by the Arab Gulf ministers, particularly those of Qatar and Oman who spearheaded the normalisation of ties with Israel when Peres was in power.

Egyptian Foreign Minister Amr Moussa, who took part in the Damascus meeting last week *along with Syria and the GCC countries, said* that "it remained early" to decide whether the Arab countries should boycott or take part in the meeting in Doha. The Arab foreign ministers are scheduled to hold a regular Arab League meeting in September, and "by that time, there might be some changes which would make the adoption of a final decision on this issue more convenient," *an Egyptian diplomat told Al-Ahram Weekly*.

Syria, as **Atef Saqr** reports from Damascus, called for an Arab commitment to decisions already reached in previous meetings. The compromise it offered to the Qataris is either to postpone the MENA conference or to hold it without inviting Israel. "Our goal is not to boycott the Doha conference, but to pressure the present Israeli government by depriving it of the benefits of multilateral economic cooperation in order to induce it to renew its commitment to the principles of the peace process, particularly the principle of exchanging land for peace," one Syrian official told the *Weekly*.

Qatar, for its part, is going ahead with preparations for the MENA meeting despite Arab opposition. The government is building a new conference hall to host the meeting and has hired three cruise ships from Greece at the cost of $4.5 million in order to compensate for a shortage in hotel rooms. In a clear sign of support, the US announced it was sending a 350-member delegation to Doha, headed by Vice President Al Gore.

Qatar's emir, who met with US President Bill Clinton in Washington in June, said he was aware of the Arab opposition to the MENA conference but expressed hope that circumstances *would change by November* in a way that would make the meeting a success. Supported only by Jordan, which has already offered Doha the experience it acquired in hosting the second MENA conference, the Qatari emir said he hoped the Doha meeting would help in "pushing forward the peace process." Jordanian Prime Minister Abdel-Salam El-Majali openly supported Doha's summit in statements made earlier this week. In his view, *regional* economic cooperation is part of the peace agreements and if the Arabs call upon Israel to implement these agreements, they should be ready to carry out their part.

Qatar is yet to issue an official invitation to the Israeli government. But Qatari officials make it clear that if the meeting is to take place, Israel will be on the list of participants even if its del*egation is treated the same way as in Cairo.* The officials point out that Qatar is eager to market itself in the way Egypt did during the third MENA conference.

'No peace without Jerusalem'

Palestinian President Yasser Arafat warns that the policies of Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu, particularly the expansion of settlements in Jerusalem, are pushing the area towards an explosion. **Rasha Saad** reports

Arafat, in a speech read out by Palestine's ambassador to the Arab League, Mohamed Sobeih, affirmed that peace between Israel and the Palestinians cannot be established if Arab East Jerusalem remains under Israeli control.

Addressing a meeting organised jointly by the Arab League and the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC) dubbed "The Jerusalem Solidarity Day," Arafat accused the Israeli premier of seeking to destroy the peace process by his policy of expanding Jewish settlements in Arab East Jerusalem.

Arafat was due to take part in the meeting held to mark the 30th anniversary of the holy city's annexation by Israel after the defeat of the Arab armies in 1967. But a last-minute invitation by French President Jacques Chirac for talks on the peace process prevented Arafat from personally attending the meeting.

Arafat's speech stressed that Jerusalem is the key to peace between the Palestinians and Israel and that "there will be no peace without Jerusalem, the capital of our independent Palestinian state." He also made the point that since Netanyahu came to power a year ago, his right-wing Likud government has ordered the expansion of settlements, particularly in Jerusalem, in order to derail the peace process.

Arafat also warned that "the policy of Netanyahu's government is pushing the situation towards an explosion." He explained that "despite the sincere efforts by the United States and our Arab brothers to overcome the obstacles facing the peace process, Netanyahu's government insists on continuing the policy of imposing a de facto situation in holy Jerusalem and other parts of the West Bank and Gaza strip" by building more settlements. Arafat also called upon "all Arabs and Islamic nations to confront the "crime of judaising Jerusalem and to stand up against the settlement offensive."

Arafat reiterated the Palestinian stand, accusing the Israeli government of violating the 1993 Oslo agreement and stating that the fate of Jerusalem should be determined in bilateral final status negotiations. The final settlement talks officially opened in the Egyptian Red Sea resort of Taba one month before the former Labour government fell from power in national elections. Since Netanyahu took office, no other sessions have been held and the peace talks are paralysed.

Other speeches delivered at the "Jerusalem Solidarity Day" sharply criticised the latest US Congress decision to consider Jerusalem as "the united and eternal" capital of Israel, without respecting Arab feelings and Muslim and Christian claims to the holy city.

In a telephone interview with *Al-Ahram Weekly*, Faisal Husseini, in charge of the Jerusalem file at the Palestinian National Authority, accused Israel of escalating tensions in the holy city through its provocative acts. "The Israeli measures of confiscating Arab lands and identity cards, the continuous closures [of Palestinian self-rule areas], raising the already excessive taxes imposed on Palestinian merchants — all these add to the deadlock facing the peace process," Husseini said.

Husseini added that these measures show that the "government of Netanyahu does not want peace. Instead it is carrying out plans to strengthen its occupation under the cover of peace."

Husseini urged the Arab countries to exercise political pressure on Israel by threatening to revive the economic boycott. The Arabs should also seek the support of Europe and the international community in order to force Israel to respect its commitments and implement signed agreements, he said.

UN slams Israeli settlements

The UN issued this week "a strong condemnation document" of Israel's settlement policy

In a report released Friday, United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan confirmed that Israel has not abandoned its construction of a new settlement in occupied Palestinian territory in East Jerusalem and this is "viewed as particularly serious."

The report was requested by an emergency special session of the UN General Assembly in April which demanded the immediate cessation of construction at the site of Jabal Abu Ghneim in East Jerusalem. The Assembly resolution, adopted by a vote of 134 to three with 11 abstentions, also demanded a halt to all other Israeli settlement activities and called for an end to all support for "illegal Israeli activities" in the occupied Palestinian territories.

The Assembly resolution was adopted after the UN Security Council failed twice, because of US vetoes, to approve a decision calling upon Israel to halt its settlement activities in Palestinian territories. No state has veto power in the General Assembly where votes reflect the will of the wider international community. However, General Assembly resolutions are not binding, unlike those of the Security Council.

The General Assembly resolution was considered a victory for the Arab countries and the reflection of a consensus among the international community, except for the United States and Israel, that Israeli settlement activities are a threat which might destroy the whole peace process. "According to the information available to the United Nations, the government of Israel, as of 20 June 1997, has not abandoned its construction of a new Israeli settlement at Jabal Abu Ghneim," Annan said.

Even before the report was issued, the Palestinian UN observer, supported by the Arab countries, declared his intention of calling for the reconvening of the emergency Assembly session. Annan detailed exchanges which led him to conclude that the conditions set by Israel made it impossible for him to send a special envoy to the area to help prepare his report. The latter is, therefore, based on "reliable sources available to the United Nations at headquarters and in the field."

The report stated that settlement activity went on unabated throughout the Occupied Territories during the 1992-1996 period, a reference to the period predating the election of Israel's right-wing leader Binyamin Netanyahu to the premiership. Annan's observations matched those of Arab critics of the former Israeli Labour government led by Shimon Peres and his predecessor Yitzhak Rabin who, unlike Netanyahu, expanded Israeli settlements in secrecy, using the pretext of "natural growth." For Netanyahu, however, the issue of settlements is more ideological as, according to his right-wing views, Jews have the right to settle anywhere in what he considers to be "Eretz Israel", the land of Greater Israel, in territory that includes the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and, more importantly, Arab Jerusalem.

"The Abu Ghneim incident is viewed as particularly serious for a number of reasons." Annan explained in the report. Politically, the start of building at Jabal Abu Ghneim on 18 March "represents the first move to construct an entirely new settlement in occupied Palestinian lands since a freeze was imposed on such activities by the previous Israeli government in the context of the peace process."

Geographically, it "represents the final link in a chain of settlements constructed by Israel around occupied East Jerusalem," while demographically it will have the "significant effect of further advancing the forced alteration of the religious and ethnic composition of occupied East Jerusalem." Finally, on the economic level, Jabal Abu Ghneim is "expected to have a damaging effect on an already devastated Palestinian economy in the Occupied Territories."

According to the report, Israel's refusal to stop construction at Jabal Abu Ghneim "appears to represent, in the view of the Palestinian people, the largest single negative factor in the breakdown of the peace process, and the fomenting of unrest in the Occupied Territories," referring to the two months of public demonstrations and protests by Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, the West Bank and Jerusalem.

Annan further said that Israeli settlement expansion activities also took place in numerous locations throughout the occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip. Israel was also widely reported to have prepared plans for the construction of new settler housing units in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. "External support for settlements and their economic infrastructures continued... including through private support from foreign companies and individuals," the report stated.

Israel's Foreign Ministry issued a statement Sunday blasting Annan's report by saying that it "will join a long list of one-sided United Nations documents on the Arab-Israeli conflict. This report again proves that the UN cannot play a role as an honest broker in the peace process." Israel also described the General Assembly session that requested Annan's report as a waste of the world body's resources. "The fact that [the General Assembly] is convened raises astonishment given the many important and serious issues on the international agenda which do not get the attention they deserve in the United Nations," the Israeli Foreign Ministry statement said.

Such statements underlie what a number of UN observers noted as an increasing sense of annoyance among many countries about Israel's continuing indifference to the will of the international community. Annan's report, according to these observers, might also signal an end to the period of "honeymoon" in his relations with the United States which strongly backed his election for the post of UN secretary-general earlier this year.

One of the main reasons the United States opposed the re-election of former UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros Ghali for a second term, according to UN diplomats, was his release of a report condemning Israel for bombing a UN shelter in south Lebanon last year, killing 103 people, mostly women and children.

Endless debate over *qat*

The Yemeni army has prohibited the chewing of *qat* while on duty. But as **Karim El-Gohary** found out in Sanaa, enforcement will not be easy

"Sorrow which was haunting the young man is chased away. Melancholy and all reasons for worries escape from your heart.
It is a gift that gives you pleasure, humour and mercy — as if you are climbing slowly up to heaven itself." The rhymes of Yemeni poet Abdallah Al-Iriyani refer to the effects of the most popular drug in the southern Arabian peninsula — the stimulating leaves of the *qat* tree.

What beer is for the Bavarian, wine for the French and vodka for the Russian, *qat* is for the Yemenis — a people's drug. The *maqiyal*, the daily afternoon *qat* session held *throughout Yemen, is a veritable institution.* While an uninformed visitor might look at the empty streets of Sanaa and get the impression that the Yemeni national soccer team is playing in the World Championship finals, the truth is that the hour of *qat* is at its zenith.

The sight is the same in most houses. At least half a dozen men make themselves comfortable on the floor cushions of the *mafrash* on the highest floor of the house. This kind of penthouse, similar to a living room, is a fixture in Yemeni houses and is used solely for the purpose of collective *qat* chewing.

The *maqiyal* not only shapes private life in Yemen but is also an important political institution. In the *qat* chewing sessions, opinions are exchanged, formed, challenged, changed or strengthened, regardless of party or tribal lines. The arts of listening, palavering, free speech and polite arguments are daily practised in this context.

Good quality *qat* loosens the tongue but does not cloud the mind. Some important decisions that have gone down in the history books of the country were made in such sessions. *It is said that several coups d'état or* revolutions were plotted in such circumstances.

Qat sessions reduce the case load of Yemeni courts, as many legal conflicts such as squabbles about plots of land are settled during a *maqiyal*. Both parties present their cases to the host, often a well respected community leader, tribal sheikh or *qadi* (judge), without being interrupted. The issue is then discussed among the *participants until the* host gives his final verdict, which is usually accepted by both sides.

After about one hour of chewing, the participants enter something which Yemenis call *sa'at as-Sulaiman*, the hour of Solomon. The session's highlight comes when all participants, peacefully united, come closer to Solomon's wisdom and knowledge. "The participants describe the feeling as unbounded harmony. Between individuals and environment there are no longer any borders, both melt together with some sense of omnipotence," writes German *researcher Armin Schoppen in a field study* about *qat*. That is the moment an agreement has to be reached, for soon the participants enter the stage of drowsy absence, which is often followed by a melancholic or even depressive phase. But even this experience remains a collective one as the participants drink tea spiced with cardamom and cloves and take a long puff from the water pipe before they make their way home.



photo: Randa Shaath

A Yemeni at his "hour of Solomon"

As long as *qat* has existed, *and it has* been traced back to the 13th century, arguments about the advantages and disadvantages of the drug have persisted. Critics point to the long-term health hazards of *qat*, like the lack of appetite and insomnia it induces that can cause more severe illness. *Qat* is also rumoured to reduce male potency.

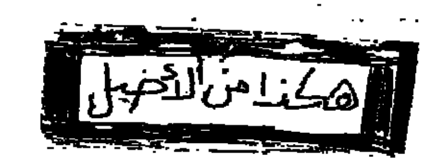
It might also reduce the country's military potential. That is the fear of the Ministry of Defence, which issued a new order two weeks ago banning the consumption of *qat* among members of the armed forces while on duty. It is also a "question of proper *appearance*," as one official source at the ministry put it.

Economists, for their part, are appalled by the amount of valuable agricultural land wasted by the cultivation of *qat* in one of the world's poorest countries. Especially in poverty-stricken families, *qat* consumption can have a devastating effect. Up to a third of a family's income is often spent on the intoxicating plant, using up money that is already lacking to provide for the nutritional needs of the family.

Studies estimate that Yemenis average six hours daily in collective chewing sessions and a study by the University of Sanaa has calculated that Yemenis spend about $53 million annually on their favourite obsession.

These arguments are all used by the country's *Anti-Qat League*, an organisation that at the moment is fighting a lost cause. Since the unification of north and south Yemen seven years ago, *qat* consumption has boomed. The reason is simple. In the former socialist South Yemen, the use of *qat* was limited to Thursdays and Fridays. Since unification, the state has put no limits on the use of *qat*. With a rate of consumption often higher than in the north, it seems *that qat* chewers in the south are actively making up for lost *qat*-chewing years.

Islamic scholars have been fighting for centuries about whether *qat* is *haram*, that is, forbidden according to the Islamic religion, or *halal*, accepted by Islam. Until now Islamic scholars have not been able to reach a consensus on the issue. The most often quoted *fatwa*, or Islamic ruling, *is that of Ibn Hajar* Al-Haithami, a 16th century Muslim scholar who lived in Mecca. After a long and thorough study of various Islamic books, Al-Haithami concluded that the leaves are neither *haram* nor *halal*. He characterised them instead as *shubahat*, something that should be viewed with doubt and suspicion. Such a verdict comes very close to today's warnings on cigarette packs: "*Smoking* is damaging for your health," an advice which can easily be ignored by any dyed-in-the-wool smoker or *qat* chewer.



Rooted in the land

The current deadlock in the Palestinian-Israeli peace talks brought the conflict back to its roots: a struggle over land, Graham Usher reports from Jerusalem

With the current impasse in the peace process, there are signs that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is returning to its source — which is less a struggle over the status of a future Palestinian entity than over the ownership and control of land. This war of position is being fought out throughout the Occupied Territories, but especially in East Jerusalem.

On the one hand, the Israeli government has long-term plans to expand the eight Jewish settlements in East Jerusalem by adding 22,000 housing units. These are apart from the 6,500 units — housing some 32,000 new settlers — slated to be built for the Har Homa settlement at Jabal Abu Ghneim in Arab East Jerusalem. On the other hand, Palestinians are resorting to Intifada-like tactics, such as the general strike on 29 June observed by Palestinian merchants in East Jerusalem in protest of Israel's taxation policies.

Less publicly, 170,000 or so Palestinians are engaging in what the Israeli lawyer Daniel Seidemann (who defends Palestinian families whose homes have been taken over by Jewish settler groups) has termed a "quiet building boom" across East Jerusalem's 19 Palestinian villages. The difference is that while the settlement expansions enjoy the sanction of the Israeli authorities, Palestinian construction, almost universally, is deemed "illegal".

Last month Jerusalem's Likud mayor, Ehud Olmert, declared a moratorium on the demolition of "illegal" Palestinian constructions in East Jerusalem until October. Prior to this, the municipality had been demolishing Palestinian houses in East Jerusalem at an average of 50 per year. The freeze came less from a change of policy by Likud than under pressure from Israel's General Security Service (GSS), wary that a spate of house demolitions in East Jerusalem would spark protests akin to those that followed the Western Wall tunnel opening last September.

The moratorium has been seized on by Palestinians in East Jerusalem to address their chronic housing needs. "The Palestinians sense they can now build without getting a demolition order or at least without an order being implemented," says Seidemann. The result is the construction of hundreds of new houses and the additions of floors and extensions to existing houses in areas throughout East Jerusalem.

The Palestinian village of Issawiyya, annexed to Jerusalem by Israel after the 1967 war, is a prime example. Tucked in between the Jewish settlement of French Hill and the Hebrew University, Issawiyya is home to around 7,000 Palestinians. It is also a graphic illustration of Israel's discriminatory land policies towards Palestinians in East Jerusalem.

Before the 1967 war, Palestinians in Issawiyya owned 10,000 dunams of land (1 dunam = 1/4 acre). After the occupation, Israel annexed 3,000 dunams, declaring the remaining 7,000 dunams to be outside "municipal Jerusalem" and inside the West Bank. In the years since, Israel has expropriated a further 1,000 dunams for the French Hill settlement and redrawn Issawiyya's borders so that the village now covers no more than 660 dunams. Palestinians are legally entitled to use 120 dunams for residential construction. Thus, says ex-Jerusalem municipality councillor Sara Kaminker, "In the space of 30 years Palestinians in Issawiyya have seen their land shrivel from 10,000 dunams to 120 dunams".

Coupled with a rising birth rate, the result of this squeeze on Palestinian living space has been massive overcrowding and worsening housing conditions. A visitor to a home in Issawiyya might well find eight people living in one room, including grandparents, parents and children. Throughout the Palestinian villages in East Jerusalem, the average density is 6.8 persons per housing unit compared to 3.3 persons per unit in the settlements.

Palestinians who try to use lawful means to build houses have to navigate "a maze of legal, economic and bureaucratic obstacles", says Seidemann. A building permit from the municipality can cost $20,000 and take up to five years to be authorised. Even when all the financial and administrative procedures are observed, the municipality is quite tight-fisted in issuing permits to Palestinians. Last year 108 building permits were issued for the entire Palestinian population of East Jerusalem, according to Khalil Tafakji, member of the Palestinian Housing Committee. Almost 10 times this number were issued to the Jewish population, says Seidemann.

The undeclared aim of these policies is to drive Palestinians out of East Jerusalem or, as the municipality puts it, to maintain Jerusalem's overall "demographic balance" of being 72 per cent Jewish and 28 per cent Palestinian.

Last year, Israel's Interior Ministry chose to "re-interpret" the law governing Palestinians' residency rights in East Jerusalem. In the past, East Jerusalem's Palestinians could lose their residency status if they lived outside the city for seven or more years or took a foreign passport. Under the new interpretation, residency can be revoked if Palestinians fail to produce evidence that "their centre of life" is within Jerusalem's municipal borders. The result is that 1,047 Palestinians from East Jerusalem now living in the West Bank or elsewhere have lost their residency status over the last two years.

The sole succour Palestinians have is that the policies are not working. The Interior Ministry's measure has resulted in a major wave of Palestinians returning to East Jerusalem from the West Bank and Gaza to ensure their residency rights. "The policy has clearly backfired," says Seidemann. "The Israeli authorities have discovered that for the satisfaction of depriving 500 Palestinians of their residency in East Jerusalem they are getting 5,000 Palestinians returning to their homes". It is largely these "returning Palestinians", say Palestinians from East Jerusalem, who are driving the current "illegal" building boom.

The Israeli press alleges that the building is being financed by the Palestinian Authority (PA). Palestinians in Issawiyya wish it were true. Rather, they say, the illegal building in East Jerusalem is what it appears — a spontaneous, grassroots movement that has grown in response to a major housing crisis. But the movement clearly has a political dimension, admits Mohamed Mahmoud, a Palestinian from Issawiyya. "We have learned from the Israelis," he says. "They gained control of East Jerusalem by creating facts on the ground. If Palestinians are to get it back, we, too, must create facts on the ground."



Palestinian merchants demonstrating in East Jerusalem in protest of Israel's taxation policy

photo: Khaled Zigahri

More than a pound of flesh

The sale of Palestinian land to Israelis has long been a controversial issue, involving the ostracism, excommunication and even the killing of Palestinian brokers, all practices presented by Israel as proof of the PNA's barbarism. But, as Saleh Abdel-Jawad writes, current legislation may pose a far greater threat to territorial integrity

The death of three Palestinian land brokers last May, following the unanimous decision of the Palestinian legislative council to condemn to death any Palestinian who sells or facilitates the sale of land to Israelis, precipitated intense and wide-ranging reactions. The most sensationalist emerged from the Israeli side, which seized upon the incident to divert international attention from the settlement issue — the single factor most likely to jeopardise the peace process. The Israeli attempt to portray the PA as a bloodthirsty and racist clique inimical to human rights, particularly the right to life and the freedom to dispose of one's private property as one wishes, was a deliberate distortion of the truth, intended to obfuscate the true political ramifications of process of the transfer of land ownership in Palestine.

Even before the Intifada, there were numerous attempts on the life of Abu Zeid, the *mukhtar* (mayor) of the village of Badya in the district of Nablus. He was suspected of complicity with the Israeli authorities and his name featured prominently in the notorious land scandal of 1985 when it was revealed that he, like many other brokers, had forged documents in order to facilitate the purchase of Arab land by Israeli buyers. Hatred of Abu Zeid grew with the eruption of the Intifada, made particularly intense by the fact that, after every assassination attempt — seven in all — large numbers of villagers were arrested, imprisoned and subjected to harsh punishment.

Finally, on 10 October 1988, the bullets hit their mark. So great was the villagers' delight at Abu Zeid's death that hundreds of them surrounded the car in which he had been shot and set it alight with his body inside. An Israeli television programme broadcast a year later, on 24 July 1989, showed an interview with one of the villagers, who said: "He [Abu Zeid] sold our land, put our children in prison and said, 'I'd like to slaughter you all!' The people were fed up with his tyranny and decided to kill him. He was a microbe that we got rid of for the sake of our village and others. We don't want traitors in our midst."

One of the ruses commonly used by brokers like Abu Zeid was to dupe people into signing official papers of sale. One case was reported thus in an Israeli newspaper: "When his wife died, one of the villagers in Badya went to the *mukhtar* to obtain the necessary papers in order to arrange for her burial. The *mukhtar*, however, who had been appointed to this position by the civil administration, took advantage of the husband's grief and despair in order to obtain his signature on a large number of documents, among which were several blank forms. He told the widower that the process involved endless paperwork and that the blank forms would help save time. The *mukhtar* transformed one of these papers into an official document in which the unwitting husband attested that he had sold a piece of his land and received payment for it."

According to the newspaper report, the *mukhtar* was collaborating with Israeli land agents and government officials who provided him with the blank forms for him to use when the occasion presented itself.

Hundreds of cases of forgery and swindling have taken place in this manner, revealing the existence of a widespread network of collusion between brokers and individuals in the Israeli judiciary, army, police and civil administration, up to the ministerial level.

Another method used by Arab land-brokers who double as labour contractors is to hire prospective employees, particularly old and illiterate labourers, for Jewish-owned companies and have them sign so-called receipts of payment, which are actually attestations of sale of their property.

Ahmed Awda, who had been the most affluent Palestinian land broker in the years since 1967, headed a ring of real estate agents of which Abu Zeid was a member. Awda used another ruse to acquire property. He would buy small plots of land and pay the price in full, then publish the declaration of sale in *Al-Anba'*, a very limited-circulation Arabic-language newspaper published in Israel. Then he would buy up all the copies of the relevant edition, in which the plot of land was described as significantly larger than the plot he had actually bought. Awda was killed on 30 October 1993 by masked assailants who took his gun from him and beat him to death.

In many instances a Palestinian's refusal to sell his land was equivalent to a death sentence at the hands of a land agent's armed thugs. Only a few cases have been documented, but one of those which is that of Ibrahim Ismail Arbas, an elderly farmer murdered in 1984 by contract killers in the pay of a broker. The killers cut off the tips of his fingers in order to transfer his fingerprints to the deeds of sale of his property. The same year, inhabitants of his village came across the corpse of Zarifa Hadidun in the field behind her house. There were traces of blue ink on her fingers. Her land, like that of Arbas, eventually ended up in the hands of Israeli settlers.

The vicinity of Arbas and Hadidun's village, where Ahmed Awda also operated, was the scene of some of the most vicious crimes committed in connection with land acquisition. In the village of Ras Atiya, rumours circulated that one of its inhabitants, Abdel-Rahim Khalil, was poisoned by members of Awda's ring. It was also suggested that, in December 1985, a ring of Arab and Jewish property agents conspired in the murder of Hassan Abdel-Halim of the village of Qatna. The fire which consumed the archives of the Nablus court was attributed to arsonists attempting to destroy the documents related to nearly 750 cases of property fraud.

Other methods of fraud used by Arab real estate brokers have included forging documents and identity cards in the name of landowners. One well-known case which took place in the district of Ramallah in 1981 involved the falsification of proxies through which Arab brokers were able to dispose of large tracts of land in the villages of Nabi Samuel and Al-Jib. The Arab brokers in this case were working in collusion with a Jewish real estate agent identified as Shamuel Ainaf.

According to an eye witness in Kafr Thulth in the district of Tulkaram, a frequent ruse of Arab land brokers in that area is to hire Jewish land surveyors to survey plots of property and put up signs indicating that the property is for sale or earmarked for confiscation by the Israeli authorities. The agents then call on the property owners in order to convince them to sell their land before they are forced to forfeit it altogether. Evidently, numerous landowners have sold their property to the agents at prices far lower than their actual worth.

In some instances, police coercion was used to obtain the signatures of owners. Jamal Ben Suleiman Hamoud was the deputy commander of police in Qalqiliya. In at least two cases, this officer claimed that he had received information indicating that certain property owners had arms concealed in their homes. After conducting a search of his victims' homes, he would take them into the police station for questioning. Witnesses would be brought in to clear them and, when he was "satisfied" with the testimony, the officer would have the accused sign affidavits testifying to the fact that they neither owned nor concealed weapons. In fact, however, his victims had unwittingly signed deeds for the sale of their property.

Hamoud, a Druze, was working in collusion with a group of Arab and Jewish real estate brokers. According to the *Jerusalem Post* of 15 January 1986, 17 Arabs, including three police officers, one of whom was the deputy police commander in Qalqiliya and head of investigations, as well as two village mayors, an employee in the Qalqiliya court, and a real estate agent, had received bribes, swindled property owners and used fraudulent documents in connection with the sale of land.

Most Palestinians view the sale of their land as an unforgivable sin and refuse to sell it in spite of numerous pressures and temptations. Israelis have always needed Palestinian intermediaries to purchase the land and transferring ownership to the Israeli side.

Some were actively recruited as agents for the Israeli authorities. The more implicated they were — some even began to carry weapons and intimidate their communities — the more their communities despised them. During the Intifada, this type of agent was considered the most dangerous threat to Palestinian society. The only person against whom the United National Leadership (UNL) issued a death sentence during the entire period of the Intifada was a real estate broker who had sold the residence belonging to the Orthodox patriarchy in old Jerusalem to a group of Jewish extremists.

Reference to such agents in the communiqués of the UNL, Hamas and other local groups during the Intifada was relatively rare as both the Intifada and the killing of suspected agents greatly reduced the transfer of property ownership to the Israelis by "legitimate" means. Because of the changes in the methods of procuring land under the Likud government, there has been a further sharp drop in the operations of brokers, as the Israeli government expropriates more and more land on the pretext that it is state land.

The notorious murder of the real estate agent Mustafa Abu Bakr, nicknamed Abu Zeid, illustrates the intensity of people's hatred of the network of byroads that has accompanied the settlement process since 1967. This network was not constructed to guarantee Israeli security, but to circumscribe Palestinian cities, prevent their expansion, fragment the West Bank and, finally, serve new Israeli settlements.

For the most part, the transfer of property to Israel after 1967 took place under the aegis of Israeli military laws which are not even subject to Israeli constitutional control. The contradictory trends in Palestinian circles toward the issue of property brokers are part and parcel of the general confusion over the issue of Palestinian agents in the pay of Israel in general. As a result, the practices and official statements of Palestinian authorities in this regard have constituted a series of poorly considered reactions.

For example, the statement of Minister of Justice Freih Abu Median that "any Palestinian against whom it can be proved that he sold or facilitated the transfer of property to Israeli parties shall be sentenced to death without lengthy procedures, regardless of the size of land in question" gave the Israelis the opportunity to accuse the Palestinian authorities of putting on sham trials in the presence or absence of the accused.

No sooner had the Israelis launched this campaign, supported by the anti-PA US administration, than the Palestinian minister of justice began to soften his tone. He announced that Palestinian real estate agents engaged in the sale of land to Jews would have the opportunity to repent on the condition that they provided all information available to them. This statement was followed by several other retractions and statements of appeasement by other Palestinian officials. The absence of any coherent policy on this issue and the lack of coordination between the Palestinian judiciary authorities, security authorities, and the press have reflected very poorly on the PA.

The issue of the sale of land is very complex and involves far more than security considerations. Consequently, it requires a well-informed, clearly designed policy that operates under the sovereignty of law. Perhaps a starting point for this policy would be to inflict punishments involving social ostracism and religious excommunication against the perpetrators. If indeed the Jordanians have drawn up a list of suspected brokers who facilitated the transfer of property to Israeli parties, this list should be published in full, but only after thorough scrutiny. At the same time, it is important to prevent the Israeli authorities from distributing lists they have cooked up with the aim of spreading confusion.

The writer is a professor of political science and director of the Centre for Studying and Documenting the Palestinian Community at Birzeit University.

'Anything but a peace mission'

The extent of the torture, rape and murder committed by UN soldiers in Somalia is now coming to light. **Faiza Rady** looks at the horrific reality of the "peacekeeping" mission

Two paratroopers from an elite Belgian unit that served as part of the UN peacekeeping contingent in Somalia went on trial last week for torturing a Somali child. The two stand accused of "roasting" a child over a fire, while one of their colleagues is charged with forcing another child to drink salt water and eat worms and his own vomit. In these particular cases, the two children were fortunate enough to survive the torture. One of their small peers was not so lucky. Accused of stealing from the UN compound, the child died as a result of dehydration and sun exposure after a group of soldiers locked him in a metal box, which they left in the sun for two days — denying him water.

Reports of such atrocities are not isolated and were not exclusively committed by an aberrant group of Belgian racists. Stories of other European and North American UN soldiers accused of gross human rights violations in Somalia abound. Earlier this month, the Italian government established a special commission to investigate the torture of Somali civilians by Italian UN troops. One particularly damning piece of evidence is a photo published in the Italian magazine *Panorama*. The picture shows an Italian soldier applying electrodes to the genitals of a naked Somali man, pinned to the ground by another soldier sitting on his wrists. In the wake of the public outrage that followed such revelations, two senior generals heading the Italian contingent in Somalia — Bruno Loi and Carmine Fiore — were forced to resign.

"Michel Patruno, a former Italian soldier who took the pictures, said other locals were denied food and water, had the soles of their feet burnt, were hurled against razor wire, electrocuted and sexually abused," reported the British daily *The Independent*. Patruno believes that at least five Somalis died as a result of torture. Other atrocities that leaked to the press included gang rapes, shootings at crowds with live ammunition and "fun killings".

But it was the Canadian military's reputation that was the most damaged by incidents such as these. On the night of 16 March 1993, soldiers of the elite Airborne Regiment beat 16-year-old Shidane Arone to death. A picture taken of the teenager before he was murdered shows his face bloody and beaten to a pulp by Airborne soldiers posing for the camera. Two weeks earlier on 4 March, Canadian soldiers had killed another young civilian, Ahmed Aruush. Canadian army physician, Major Barry Armstrong, testified that the youth was the victim of an "execution-style slaying". Accused of prowling around. Aruush and another man fled. As they ran, the soldiers shot them in the back. Armstrong said that Aruush did not die instantly, but was killed lying down. "The man had lived for some minutes, then someone had finished him off with another shot to the head. I had my hands on that body while it was still warm and I know what I felt and what I saw," said the physician.

Many non-governmental organisations confirmed that violations of human rights were rampant during the UN's peacekeeping mandate. Isaac Sechere, an attorney for the Coalition of Somali-Canadian Organisations said his group had information on other killings, beatings and maiming by Canadian soldiers in Somalia not yet investigated by the government.

Although Armstrong reported the murder to his superiors, no immediate action was taken. It was only after he threatened to go public — almost six weeks after the killing — that the regiment's commander, Vice-Admiral Larry Murray, finally ordered a police investigation. At a recent Canadian government inquiry on Somalia, military police testified that the top brass had attempted to cover up and suppress evidence in the case. Major Vince Buonamici, a military police officer, said that there was a "high-level" conspiracy to stonewall the investigation of the fatal 4 March shooting, fostering a permissive attitude towards brutality. "This environment may have encouraged unstable members of the unit to believe they were immune to censure of brutal acts," said Buonamici.

Commenting on the army's cover-up efforts, Julian Falconer, attorney for the Urban Alliance on Race Relations, explained: "What the Somali affair tells us is that there is clear infiltration by white supremacist organisations in the military. It is more than apparent that a certain level of racism is tolerated."

The theory of a cover-up conspiracy, involving some of the army's top brass, was confirmed when Commander Doug Caie, a senior military public affairs officer, pleaded guilty to charges of altering official Somalia-related documents. Caie was a navy commander and a senior member of the media relations group at National Defence Headquarters in 1994 when he edited documents requested by radio journalist, Michael McAuliffe, under the Access to Information Act.

The buck, however, did not stop with Caie, who implicated another high-ranking government official in the case. Caie testified at the investigation that he believed the changes were approved by his then-boss, General Jean Boyle, then-associate assistant deputy minister responsible for public affairs. Boyle, who was later promoted to chief of the defence staff, was also interrogated, but he denied Caie's allegations. Whether directly or indirectly responsible for the cover-up, Boyle's reputation was tainted by the scandal. He resigned from his post two months after the interrogation.

Beyond the specifics of the attempts to cover up sordid racially-motivated crimes, many analysts believe that the Somali case proves the failure of so-called UN peacekeeping expeditions. In a study commissioned by the Somali inquiry, political scientist Allen Sens recommended that "Canada should re-think its... peacekeeping missions and be prepared to contribute military or even civilian specialists rather than fighting units." Sens also denounced the UN for using soldiers to support political agreements so that peace enforcers became a party to the conflict.

This was especially true in Somalia, where the American government pressured the UN to change the mandate of its soldiers from "peacekeeping" to "peace-enforcement". The US aim was to use the UN umbrella to legitimately eliminate the forces of Somali General Mohamed Aideed, who had rejected the American-brokered peace plan for Somalia. The UN Security Council readily complied with American demands, passing UN Resolution 837 — which legitimised the use of UN forces as full-fledged combatants. Essentially functioning as a foreign occupation army, UN troops lashed out against the Somalis — raping, torturing and killing.

"In Somalia it was anything but a peace mission," Italian paratrooper Bernedetto Bertini recounted on Italian TV. "On one occasion we fired for 24 hours non-stop. Officially, they said there were 60 dead when really there were more than 1,000. Women and children were unscrupulously fired on."




photo: AFP

Discord in Denver

Leaders of the G8 powers met in Denver, Colorado, to discuss the world economy and other issues affecting the eight largest industrialised economies. But, were any meaningful resolutions reached? asks **Joneed Khan**

US President Bill Clinton sought to sweet-talk the American public at the G8 Summit in Denver by bragging about the strength of the US economy and lecturing the Europeans and the Japanese on the virtues of unbridled liberalisation.

But he only succeeded in exposing deep transatlantic divides and, in an atmosphere fraught with disagreement, French President Jacques Chirac felt it necessary to stress that "we have traditions and we intend to abide by them." Along the same lines, Chirac also said, "A united Europe can impose *its point of view.*"

The very public incorporation of Boris Yeltsin's Russia into the former G7 could not overshadow the discord and disagreement at the summit, held on 21-22 June.

While Clinton boasted that the US had "the lowest unemployment rate in 24 years", German sources pointed out that millions of working Americans were still living below the poverty line.

Germany, France and Italy together have more than 10 million unemployed people, but French Finance Minister Dominique Strauss-Kahn said that France would "implode" if it adopted the US economic model.

Disagreement continued over NATO's expansion into Eastern Europe. The US stuck to its choice of Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic as the first three candidates, *and adamantly refused to consider Romania* and Slovenia in the first wave, which France and Italy demanded.

The new US stampede for sub-Saharan Africa provoked snide remarks from the Europeans and the Canadians who pointed out that they had been promoting trade and extending aid to these countries for years, while the US was only now taking notice of Africa and its problems.

The US pushed through a 'partnership for growth in Africa' policy, calling for more trade and private investment there, but Jacques Santer, European Commission president, showed that EU aid to Africa was already "seven times higher than US aid in 1995".

Perhaps the most spectacular disagreement of all was between the EU and the US over the environment. With just days to go before the 2nd UN Earth Summit, *which aimed to assess the follow-up* from the Rio Summit of 1992 and to table future action, the Europeans demanded firm commitment to the reduction of emissions of greenhouse gases by America — *to* no avail.

The US, home to four per cent of the world's population, accounts for 25 per cent of greenhouse gas emissions, and is the world's largest single polluter, followed by China, which *is responsible for 14 per cent* of emissions for 20 per cent of the world's population. The EU asked the US to accept its target of a 15 per cent reduction by the year 2010. In Denver, the US refused, so did Japan and Canada, whose greenhouse emissions are also rising.

Russia was welcomed to its first summit. "The decisive significance of the Denver Summit is the participation of Russia as a *permanent member of the G8,"* said German Chancellor Helmut Kohl. Yet on this front disagreements persisted. Yeltsin maintained his refusal to attend the NATO enlargement summit in Madrid and although Russia has been admitted to the Paris Club *of lending countries, it failed to obtain* a firm date for its entry into the World Trade Organization (WTO) from the EU. Yeltsin said he hoped it would be this year.

Agreement was, however, reached at Denver on several issues including international cooperation to ban human cloning, a call to China to hold free and fair elections in Hong Kong and to Greece and Turkey to "do all they can" to settle the Cyprus issue and their own dispute in the Aegean. It was also agreed to encourage Iran to play "a constructive role" in international affairs under its new, moderate, president, Mohamed Khatami.

The eight countries also announced their intention to "give new momentum" to the Middle East peace process on the basis of the "land for peace" principle and called on both sides not to undertake "actions which hobble the peace process by pre*determining* the negotiations on the *final* status" of Jerusalem and the Occupied Territories.

The Bosnia-Herzegovina situation was the most significant subject of agreement. With the US military withdrawal scheduled for June 1998, British Prime Minister Tony Blair stressed the risk of "disaster" if all aspects of the Dayton Accords were not implemented fully. Full implementation of the accords was made the condition for international aid to all parties — Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.

France and Japan agreed to send envoys to Cambodia to monitor the deteriorating political and human rights situation and to ensure that national elections scheduled for next year go ahead in free and fair conditions.

But Canada, too often picked by the US *to deal with delicate foreign missions* — such as in Bosnia, Haiti and the African Great Lakes region — resisted US prompting to spearhead a move to bring the Khmer Rouge leader Pol Pot to trial for crimes against humanity before an international tribunal. "Why should we be the ones to take charge of such a complex issue?" one foreign affairs official in Ottawa asked.

The lack of harmony at the *summit* was such that Kohl and Chirac even refused to dress as cowboys for a dinner hosted by Clinton on the theme of the Far West.

Despite some agreements, the feeling of discontent presided. Jacques Delors, the French former European Commission president, told a radio interviewer in Paris that he would have "refused to sign the final communiqué of the summit," had he been *in Denver.*

For the sake of children or profits?

Gamil Ibrahim attended last month's ILO meeting in Geneva and detected a new form of protectionism

Would labeling products to indicate that child labour was not used in their production achieve a humanitarian goal? Or is it a ploy designed to impede the exports of a certain group of countries? Developing countries are currently arguing that the introduction of such labeling is a disguised trade barrier.

Since its establishment in 1919, the *International Labour* Organisation has never been as divided as it was at its annual conference held from 3-19 June in Geneva. The meeting witnessed a confrontation between Western industrial countries and the developing countries, represented by the Group of 77, concerning the social label, or the labeling of products to indicate their compliance with labour-related regulations.

The social label has been a contentious issue during previous meetings of the board of the ILO. The labeling of goods *aims normally to inform the consumers about the* ingredients of food, or in the case of tobacco, to warn of its perils. But should international labour standards be included in the labeling process? And is this feasible?

If we take cotton textiles as an example, can we actually ascertain that no child labour was involved in the cultivation of the cotton, in the picking of the cotton worm, or in the manufacture or shipping of the final product? It is a well-known fact that manual picking of the cotton worm is an optimum method, economically as well as *environmentally, for pest control.*

Child labour is a crucial social and humanitarian issue. According to one ILO report, "The number of working children between five and eight is at least 120 million, the overwhelming majority of them in developing countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America."

While this issue is of concern to the governments of the developing countries, the introduction of such labels can be counter-productive, virtually banishing the commodities of developing countries from world markets.

The Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) has already issued a statement objecting to the proposal. The statement argues that the social label can lead to protectionism and suggests that the ILO focuses instead on defending the interests of workers.

In his annual report, ILO Director-General Michel Hansenne comes out in support of the social label. He says that the ILO will adopt a solemn declaration reaffirming the universal respect of all its members for fundamental workers' rights whether or not the relevant conventions have been ratified.

Hansenne's proposals have been categorically rejected by the Group of 77 and the NAM on grounds that committing states to apply prescriptions of conventions they never signed nor ratified has no precedent in international law. Conference sources in Geneva say the differences remain unresolved.

References to this issue have been made in a number of international forums, such as the World Summit for Social Development held in Copenhagen in 1995 and the World Trade Organisation Ministerial Conference in Singapore in *1996. The final declaration of the latter stated the* commitment of member states to observe internationally recognised fundamental labour standards.

The concurrence of such declarations suggests that the West will pursue this matter to the end, regardless of the heavy burdens strict labour standards could place on the economies of the developing countries.

The Global Competitive Report of the World Economic Forum in 1997 notes, "The EU has outstanding technology, management and infrastructure. It is open to world markets and boasts some of the most successful exporting nations in the world. The EU's problems centre not on these fundamental factors, but on fiscal policy and labour market policy related to the extensive social welfare state put in place in the EU countries."

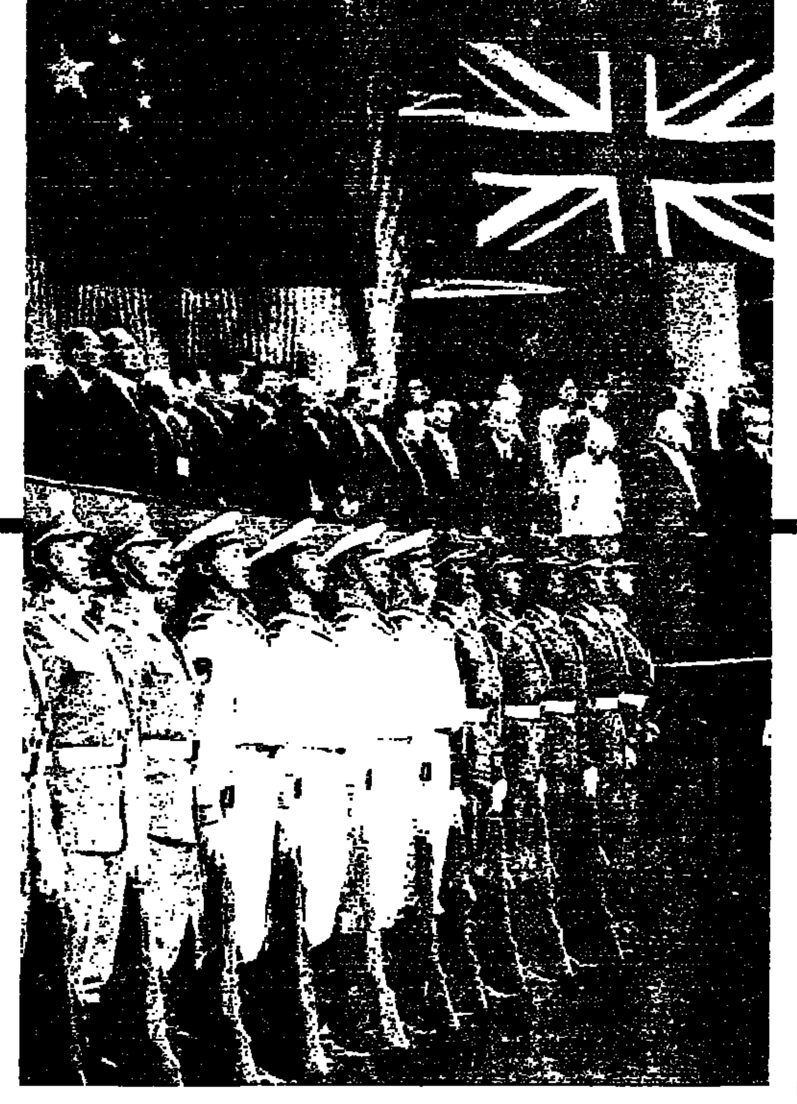
As the Western world faces the rising cost of social insurance and medical care because of the growing number of old people, the competitive advantage of developing countries, partly because of cheap labour is growing. A recent UN report states, "Half of all foreign direct investment (FDI) to emerging economies in 1996 (went) to East Asia." The West is genuinely *tempted to* impose trade barriers on developing countries, under one label or another.

In his address to the Geneva conference, Egyptian Labour Minister Ahmed El-Amawi said that Egypt strongly rejects any proposals which do not conform with the constitution of the Organisation, nor with international law, but are essentially and implicitly aimed at tying international labour standards with the liberation of world trade, an issue which does not fall within the mandate of the Organisation.

Delegations from developing countries also noted that the director-general of the ILO had dealt in his statement with topics which are still being debated in the meetings of the board of directors of the ILO. Egypt's ambassador, Mounir Zahran, said that the director-general went too far in his recommendations at the Ministerial Conference for Trade Ministers held in Singapore last year, virtually tying the enforcement of labour standards with free trade. Zahran pointed out that it was illegal to issue an international declaration committing states to provisions they had never ratified.

Back to Beijing

China's takeover of Hong Kong was reminiscent of the days when African and Asian colonies were acquiring their independence, writes Gamal Nkrumah



Chinese President Jiang Zemin, the Prince of Wales, and British Prime Minister Tony Blair (above) and (left) Red Army troops stand in salute minutes before the handover with the Union Jack and Communist China's flag as a backdrop to the ceremony *(photos: AFP)*

"The Chinese Communist Party is the unifier of the motherland. It has developed the core strength of the Chinese," the *People's Daily* declared on Sunday. Four thousand People's Liberation Army (PLA) troops moved into Hong Kong hours before the transition from British colonial rule to Chinese sovereignty. On the eve of the handover, Chinese President Jiang Zemin urged Chinese troops bound for Hong Kong to "protect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the motherland and make a great contribution to safeguarding Hong Kong's long-term prosperity and stability."

The Chinese President further noted that the "return of Hong Kong realises a long-cherished dream of all people of Chinese origin."

Only the most audacious of outsiders question how much of this forceful show of Chinese nationalism is tongue-in-cheek and how much is genuine. Beijing sees the ousting of the British from Hong Kong as the blueprint for the return of the "renegade province" of Taiwan to the Chinese motherland. The underlying message to the world is that in 1997 nationalism matters and is as powerful a political factor in international relations as ever.

The departing British displayed no less telling signs of nationalistic fervour, albeit in the muted traditional British stiff upper lip manner. The symbolism of the body language of the British officials at the handover ceremony was equally telling. For one, the Prince of Wales refused to look up as the Union Jack was being lowered.

Known to the Hong Kong people as "Fatty Patty", the city's last British governor, Chris Patten, left the country immediately after the handover ceremony. It may not have been the most polite way to depart, but it confirmed Chinese suspicions that the British are bad losers. Soon after the fireworks celebrated the handover, Western delegates left the former British colony after officially registering hostile, cynical or paternalistic remarks. Neither Patten, Prince Charles, US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, her British counterpart Robin Cook, nor British Prime Minister Tony Blair stayed on to watch the swearing-in ceremony of Hong Kong's new Chief Executive Tung Chee-Hwa.

Born in Shanghai in 1937, Tung Chee-Hwa lived for 10 years in the United States and is today the chairman of the Hong Kong-United States Economic Cooperation Committee. After the handover ceremony, Tung assured the Hong Kong people that "they will be able to continue with their free lifestyle and that lawful and peaceful demonstrations will definitely be allowed in the future." Tung, a former chairman of Orient Overseas International, added that "some people have already made up their minds that things will go wrong here."

Beijing rejected what was widely seen as Patten's scheming and abrupt attempts to institute sweeping democratic reforms on the eve of Hong Kong reverting to China. In this, Beijing was supported by other Asian nations. A few days ago, Singapore's Lee Kuan Yew told reporters at a forum for leading Asia-Pacific business executives in Hong Kong that he thought that "the British side did not live up to their highest tradition." Lee, among the many visiting foreign dignitaries in Hong Kong to celebrate the handover, stepped down as Singapore's prime minister in 1990. Unlike the Western leaders, Lee stayed on to witness the swearing-in ceremony of Tung Chee-Hwa.

The right to seek prosperity is the only right that Beijing is wholeheartedly permitting Hong Kong. One in six people has a mobile phone in Hong Kong, and the territory has the highest number per capita of Mercedes-Benz cars. Even Patten conceded that Hong Kong has a bright future. "Growth pounds away. Reserves soar. Taxes fall. Hospitals and bridges rise. Exports increase. Crime drops. Hong Kong is a great success story, a Chinese success story," he acknowledged.

So what about the rest of former colonies in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Middle East? How do these countries see the moral of the Hong Kong success story? Nationalism seems to have deep roots in the Chinese psyche, just as it does in other parts of the post-Cold War world. The Chinese never accepted that in 1841, following the devastating "Opium Wars", the Middle Kingdom of China rapidly collapsed and was forced to lease Hong Kong island to Britain. The British-run opium trade corrupted the ancient Chinese empire and brought one of the proudest people in history to their knees.

Before the Opium Wars, the Chinese regarded Westerners, and all non-Chinese people, as uncouth "barbarians" and were cruelly humbled as a nation by the victory of the British. Now, history has come full circle for Beijing. The vanquished Chinese are vindicated and what was viewed as a shameful episode in China's history has come to an end.

"It is the vitality of Hong Kong's civil society that gives me the greatest confidence in its future," Patten wrote recently in the prestigious British daily *The Financial Times*. But it is precisely this civil society that the Communist Party feels uneasy about. It is not in Beijing's interest to kill the goose that lays the golden eggs but Beijing would like to clip the wings of Hong Kong's civil society. Patten expressed his wariness of the former colony's post-colonial political system. "In Hong Kong a free city becomes part of a country with its own notion of what freedom means, albeit garlanded with guarantees that its liberties will endure," he wrote.

Tung Chee-Hwa plans to ban political donations from foreigners to Hong Kong political parties. Democracy activists wanting to hold demonstrations will soon be required to have permits from the police. However, the show of strength by Beijing that so angered the visiting Western dignitaries does not mean that China's ruling Communist Party will clamp down on democracy activists. As the late Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping put it: "To settle the Hong Kong question peacefully, we had to take into consideration the actual conditions in Hong Kong, in China and in Britain. If we had wanted to achieve reunification by imposing socialism on Hong Kong, not all three parties would have accepted it. Reluctant acquiescence by some parties would have led to turmoil," he explained. Still, Beijing would prefer to see a political system in Hong Kong that resembles that of Singapore.

Most East Asian nations operate on the notion that Western-style democracy is not particularly conducive to economic development. East Asian leaders devise measures to curb liberties and authoritarian regimes of varying degrees oversee the impressive economic transformation of the region. Hong Kong will now be no exception. In the final analysis, the Western reaction to these events was predictable.

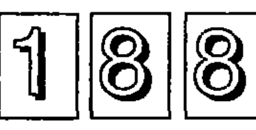
But Washington, like London, knows that it has to do business with Beijing. From a strategic point of view, China is reluctant to allow Washington to open East Asia's markets to subsidised and competitive American agricultural and high-tech exports. Beijing is also keen to check Washington's insistence on foisting Western political and social norms on Asian nations. Japan and most of the Southeast Asian countries side with Beijing against Washington in this regard.

However, some Asian countries worry about the nature of their economic relations with post-colonial Hong Kong. For example, there are over 140,000 Filipino workers in Hong Kong and the Philippines is particularly worried about the fate of the 40,000 Filipinos working in the domestic service sector there. They fear that the mainland Chinese will now take their jobs. But both Chinese and Hong Kong officials have assured neighbouring countries that the economic ties between Hong Kong and Southeast Asian nations will be further strengthened. Can countries further afield in Africa, Asia and Latin America also hope to develop closer economic ties with a post-colonial Hong Kong?

The return of Hong Kong to China is part of a long struggle to gain Communist Party control of capitalist Hong Kong and Taiwan. On the stroke of midnight on 30 June, Hong Kong reverted to China after 156 years of British colonial rule. Hong Kong is the world's seventh largest trading economy and now a Special Administrative Region of China. The city's Hang Seng stock exchange index has never been more boisterous and bullish and seems to uphold the view that the Chinese will not kill the "golden goose" of capitalist Hong Kong.

The adage of Deng Xiaoping's "one country, two systems" can now be put into practice. The Hong Kong dollar will remain pegged to the American dollar and will not be replaced by the Chinese yuan, notwithstanding the latter's increasing convertibility. According to the IMF's *World Economic Outlook* of May 1997, "China has taken measures to reduce overheating, and real GDP growth moderated to just under 10 per cent in 1996 with retail price inflation slowing further to 6 per cent, down from 22 per cent in 1994." Hong Kong's return to China can only boost the Chinese economy further. That might mean more trade and economic assistance to less fortunate former colonies in the Third World.

Al-Ahram: A *Diwan* of contemporary life



As a capitalist state until the 1952 Revolution that overthrew the monarchy, Egypt had its share of depressions that hit capitalist countries just about once every decade since the early 19th century. This *Diwan* episode, put together by Dr Yunan Labib Rizk on the basis of reports published by *Al-Ahram*, deals with the 1907 slump and its effects on Egypt. It tells of plummeting prices on the Royal Stock Exchange and the ensuing state of panic nationwide. The slump caused dozens of commercial outlets to declare bankruptcy and also pushed down the prices of cotton, Egypt's main agricultural product, by up to 25 per cent



Since the beginning of the 19th century, the capitalist system has been subject to periodical periods of stagnation, with a major crisis striking every decade on the average. The most notorious was the great depression precipitated by the international economic collapse of 1929-30. Ranking second in severity was the crisis that occurred just over 20 years previously in 1907.

For some reason or another, the effects of this latter crisis has not received its due share of scholastic concern, although there are numerous references to it in the works of Egyptian economic history of that epoch. Yet, any researcher into this topic would find in *Al-Ahram* an indispensable source and a vivid portrayal of the effects on Egyptian society.

Such crises, according to economic theory, are characterised by a three-fold process. A drop in real income levels generates a drop in demand. The consequent drop in prices reduces the amount of currency in circulation and banks refuse to open lines of credit. As business enterprises go under, unemployment skyrockets and demand continues to plummet. It is a vicious cycle that even businesses that stay afloat can barely manage to escape, as they too are forced to dispense with labour and reduce wages.

In its attempt to discover what precipitated the 1907 crisis, *Al-Ahram* sent one of its correspondents to interview "the honourable Harari Pasha, the director of two of the largest banking houses in Egypt." The cause, according to the great financier, was "the vast growth in industry, production and commerce in Europe and America, requiring such a consumption of assets that prices rose and interest rates escalated."

The ramifications of this process in Egypt were explained by *Al-Ahram* on 27 June 1907. "The primary, indeed the sole cause of the crisis is the scarcity of cash to the extent that bankers have instituted a boycott against speculators on the financial market. The bankers themselves declare this quite openly with no reservations. 'There is money in our vaults, but we will not support speculation even if we were threatened with hanging,' they say."

If *Al-Ahram* held banking policy responsible for the stagnation of the market, it also lays some of the blame on wealthy Egyptians who "stash their money in their homes as though it might be taken away from them at any minute." A general state of panic, however, appears to have overcome all financial circles. "Merchants and financiers are like armies," comments *Al-Ahram*. "If some are defeated, the sense of defeat spreads to all and in a frenzy of panic they throw down their weapons and flee the field of battle."

In a series entitled "Financial companies in Egypt and their activities", *Al-Ahram* attempted to explain how the contagion of financial disaster in Europe and the United States could spread so quickly to Egypt. In the first article of the series, the author writes, "The companies that were formed in Egypt were established by a number of entrepreneurs in European capitals such as London and Brussels. The headquarters of these companies remain in those capitals and some of these companies may be subject to Egyptian law while others are subject to British or Belgian law." That many founders chose to keep their firms subject to foreign laws was "in order to ensure that they could pursue their activities freely and unhampered by restrictions. If anything occurred that prejudiced the interests of their shareholders, most of whom are Egyptian, then the burdens of liability would not be as detrimental as if they were subject to Egyptian law."

At the time of this article there were already 120 such companies operating in Egypt and they were increasing at an alarming pace, particularly those engaged in non-productive activities. As was its custom on such occasions, *Al-Ahram* tinged its commentary with a certain cynicism. "Some of these companies will trade in rice, others will try to gain a monopoly over everything that is Egyptian owned, and it is highly likely that a company will be formed in order to monopolise the shoe-polishing industry."

The penetration of foreign capital into the Egyptian economy made it highly susceptible to the fluctuations of the capitalist markets in Europe and the US. And once these fluctuations affected the foreign-owned financial houses, there reverberations would be felt throughout the Egyptian economy, even to the remotest quarters of the countryside.

As "the circles of the crisis locked into place," as *Al-Ahram* put it, the newspaper reminded readers that "the rush of European businessmen to establish firms in Egypt caused a chain reaction in the country in their wily bid to lure droves of Egyptian people into subscribing to their business activity to the point of recklessness."

The Royal Stock Exchange was the first place to exhibit the symptoms of the crisis. On 22 May 1907, *Al-Ahram* noted a sharp drop in the prices of shares, which it attributed to "the scarcity of money in people's hands because the banks are keeping it locked up in their vaults." The National Bank, for example, "which invests more than a million pounds in London, could easily put this money to work in Egypt and other banks would follow suit." For their part, the companies too were at fault, having solicited money from the people ostensibly for expanding business but instead placing the money in the vaults out of reach of the people and the markets.

As the days passed, hopes that the fast stock decline was temporary soon eroded. *Al-Ahram* even suspected a deliberate scheme, directed by what it termed "the price-lowering party." It added, "The shares which are bought and sold on the European markets by the National Bank, the Agricultural Bank and the Land Bank could not depend on Europe alone in order to bring us the necessary money to revitalise our market, so we had to depend on ourselves. But we do not have sufficient money for that purpose."

It was only natural that a certain panic would afflict the stock market.

As the value of shares declined to little more than the value of the paper they were printed on, a group of Jewish financiers began to buy them up. Toward the end of June, *Al-Ahram* announced that Rafael Souaris had formed a committee in Europe to buy up Egyptian shares. Simultaneously, a group of brokers at the stock exchange had formed a commission funded by capital from an undesignated source for the same purpose. *Al-Ahram* quickly realised the implications. "Those financiers who have realised that Egyptians shares have plummeted to the lowest values stand to make extensive profits. These profits, under the current circumstances, will be two-fold. Firstly, they gain the shares themselves and, secondly, they profit again when their prices rise. Even supposing the impossible, which is that the value of the shares does not increase, they will still profit from the dividends, which, even for the least valuable, stand at no less than six per cent."

Before long, many of the smaller banks in the country began to go under. On 20 June, the Casa Disconto closed its doors. This bank, like many others in the midst of financial panic, had just suffered a rush of frantic customers eager to withdraw their savings. Within a matter of a few days it had to pay out LE330,000 to its customers, a considerable sum by the standards of the age, and certainly a difficult burden to shoulder for a small bank at that time.

On 24 June, the director of the Austrian Union Bank, a major shareholder in the Casa Disconto, arrived in Cairo. After conducting an audit, he determined that the bank had only suffered a 13 per cent deficit. "This deficit is relatively small, meaning that the bank only requires LE 300,000 in order to set its operations in order and open up for business again."

Panic subsided when news came that the Casa would be spared foreclosure. On 2 July, *Al-Ahram* announced that the bank's problems had been resolved in a manner that would satisfy all parties, thus averting a severe shock to the market. It was agreed that the bank would not declare bankruptcy and not put up its shares and assets for public auction. "Rather, the Union Bank will grant it a loan of LE100,000 and other Egyptian banks will loan it LE200,000. Then the creditors will liquidate the bank very gradually."

At the same time, Egyptian bankers created the Syndicate of Banks in order to obtain the necessary assets to rescue the distressed market. News of this move "has greatly alleviated the general mood," according to *Al-Ahram*. Such optimism, however, proved somewhat premature as shortly afterwards it was reported that the French banks refused to participate in the syndicate. In light of its generally francophile stance, *Al-Ahram* was distressed by the French government's instructions to French banks to follow the policy of the Credit Lyonais, which was "not to intervene in this affair." The decision "provoked considerable shock and consternation especially after hopes had been raised by the unanimous decision of the banking community to rescue and restore confidence in the financial market."

Not only did the policy of the Credit Lyonais put paid to any hopes pinned on the proposed Syndicate of Banks, but the French bank also froze all its financial transactions. "This precipitated such an enormous drop in the value of shares as to provoke the deepest anxiety and consternation in the market," commented a despairing *Al-Ahram*.

Some property owners took advantage of the situation in order to increase rents, earning themselves the scorn of *Al-Ahram*: "If landlords are not moved by mercy and compassion, at least they should act in accordance with logic and common sense. How can they raise the rents of their tenants' homes or warehouses when the latter's income has dropped by nearly half?"

The slump in the economy also caused many commercial outlets to declare bankruptcy. Perhaps the liquidation of one of the largest firms of that period, the Khalifa Naggar Company, best illustrates the effect of the crisis on this field of economic activity. Unwilling to grant this company a respite of three months in order to meet its commitments, its three creditors — the Anglo, Ottoman and National Banks — insisted on conducting an audit. Having found that the losses and outstanding debts could be covered by the company's capital, the creditors decided to liquidate it over a period of three years.

It was not long before other commercial firms met the same fate. A few days later, the newspaper reported that 46 major firms had submitted their ledgers to the courts as a result of their inability to service their debts. "These companies had depended upon the banks for credit and to provide them a certain leeway in servicing their debts. However, the banks have locked up their vaults, originally by design and then under duress, and now people are unable to pay their debts while banks in Europe continue to press Egyptian banks and companies for payment. The crisis that has gripped the stock market has spread to the banks and from the banks to commerce and it is to be feared that it will soon spread to agriculture."

Al-Ahram's apprehensions were well placed. Already at the beginning of the crisis cotton prices, which stood at 24 riyals per qantar dropped to 18 riyals, contrary to predictions that it would rise to 30. "The drop in the price of cotton which is at the heart of Egyptian commerce has caused many to suffer enormous losses, bringing ruin to numerous firms," *Al-Ahram* lamented, adding its hopes that the crisis would be only temporary "so that the panic caused by the slump can subside and confidence can be restored."

Unfortunately, such hopes were in vain. The drop in prices had affected the cotton reserves from the previous season, driving down the prices of cotton futures. Farmers had to reduce the prices of their forthcoming crops by as much as 20 per cent and were simultaneously forced to take out loans "at usurious rates" in order to pay off government tariffs. Acting in tandem with other banks in the country, the Agricultural Bank refused to offer credit, driving the farmers to sell their crops at the most paltry rates. "We have also received information from various quarters of the countryside that the *fellahin* are now forced to borrow at 50 per cent interest."

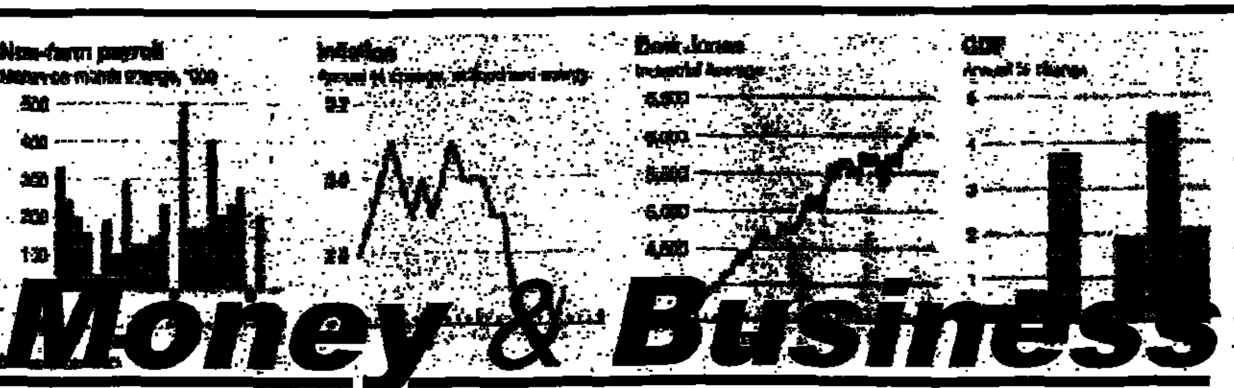
Having extended its grip over all sectors of the economy, Egyptians could do little but wait until the crisis subsided in Europe. The first signs of relief finally arrived at the end of 1907.



The author is a professor of history and head of Al-Ahram History Studies Centre.

New flats in new cities

THE GENERAL assembly of the Holding Company for Construction, chaired by Dr Atef Obeid, public sector minister and state minister for administrative development, has decided to begin constructing 10,000 housing units in the new cities, in addition to installing sewerage systems in five cities in northern Egypt. The general assembly gave a deadline of 20 months for completing the construction.



Arab meeting discusses free trade zone

THE SIX-member committee formed by the Economic and Social Council of the Arab League held a meeting recently at the League's general secretarial headquarters. Ministers of economy from Egypt, Syria, Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Morocco, and the Arab League secretary-general attended the meeting. The committee had decided the final form of the executive programme of the accord aimed at establishing an Arab free trade zone by the year 2008.

Al-Ahram Egyptian Products Exhibition in Portugal, 5-13 July 1997

Egyptian delegation to leave for Lisbon today

TO DISPLAY the high quality of Egyptian products, Al-Ahram will organise an exhibition in which Egyptian products will be displayed. The event will take place in Portugal from 5-13 July 1997 and will coincide with the International Handicrafts Exhibition sponsored by the General Authority for International Fairs and the Egyptian Embassy in Portugal, as well as the Egyptian Commercial Representation Office.

The exhibition is being organised by Pyramids Advertising Agency.

The Egyptian Embassy is working on preparing detailed information on Egyptian products for Portuguese importers.

Meetings will also be organised between Portuguese businessmen and their Egyptian counterparts. The embassy will also provide facilities regarding visas.

Mohamed Khairal, Egyptian ambassador to Portugal, will meet the delegation upon their arrival in Lisbon to attend a reception party.

Who's who at the exhibition:

— International Bureau for Khan Al-Khalili Products
Tel. 5934062 Fax. 5934062
Booth no. 31, 50
— Imex Trade Co.
Tel. 4828411/2721110 Fax. 4828411
Booth no. 3, 4
— National Foundation for the Development of Productive Families
Tel. 3370176 Fax. 3373118
Booth no. 26, 28, 30
—Florenz Import, Export and Commercial Agencies
Tel. 3785470
Booth no. 40, 42, 44
— Salamtex Lace Manufacturers
A. Salam & Co.
Tel. 4539339/2573115 Fax. 2563635
Booth no. 29
— Al-Nasr Spinning, Weaving and Knitting Company (SHOURBAGY)
Tel. 3141336/3145836 Fax. 3144166
Booth no. 9
— Ali Copper Factory
ALI WAFA
Tel. 5107350
Booth no. 51, 52
— E & D Alimonesto International
Tel. 3933526 Fax. 3927344/3929788
Booth no. 1, 2
—Industrial Development Bank of Egypt
Tel. 5794017 Fax. 5794016
Booth no. 13
— The Egyptian-Spanish Spinning and Weaving Industrial Co. (MASS) S.A.E.
Booth no. 11
— Thomas Co. for Household & Furniture
Booth no. 12
— Middle East Carpet Co. Associated S.A.E. MECCA
Booth no. 10.
— The Egyptian Co. for International Trade
Eng. Mohamed H.M. Khalil & Co.
Tel. 3840789 Fax. 3869001
Booth no. 33
— Al-Hashash for Handmade Rugs and Carpets
Tel. 047 997038
Booth no. 27
— Egypt Gulf for Services and Trade Company
— El-Fekey Company for Trade and Clothes
Tel. 5750801 Fax. 4023280
Booth no 23, 25
— Sally for Aluminium Factory
Tel. 4013265 - 4016104 Fax. 4023280
Booth no. 37
— El-Masriya Co. for Macaroni and Starches
Tel. 3839613 Fax. 3836269
Booth no. 7
— El-Sherbini for Agri-development
Tel. 3620120 Fax. 3933909
Booth no. 8
— Bitco for Estate and Touristic Inv.
Tel. 3610100 - 3610200 Fax. 3610300
Booth no. 48, 49
— Horus Co for Import and Export Commercial Agency
Tel. 5187764 Fax 3938818
Booth no. 47
— Egyptian Iron and Steel
Tel. 3916230
Booth no. 22
— 6th October Factory for Aluminium and Stainless Steel
Magdi El-Sayed Ahmed
Tel. 2820777 Fax. 2829311
Booth no. 14, 16
— International Ahmed Mostafa & Co.
Tel. 5933960 Fax. 3938818
Booth no. 6
— Canal Company for Ropes, and Natural & Synthetic Fibre Products
Tel. 066 220427 - 220428 Fax 066 239541
Booth no. 24
— Hegazi Import, Export & Commercial Agencies Company
Tel. 3535660
Booth no. 18
— Ibrahim Hussein & Co. for Silver and Copper A & H
Tel. 5797719
Booth no. 36, 38
— Falcon Tours Services
Tel. 040 348268 Fax 040 331800
Booth no. 54
—Abduh Gaballa Leather Products Import and Export
Tel. 050 665653 Fax. 3285058
Booth no. 15
— Nassar Clothes Import and Export
Tel. 040 991591 Fax. 3205058
Booth no. 17
— Al-Shafei for Import and Export
Tel. 3294872 Fax. 3485173
Booth no. 20
— Magdi Hafez Furniture
Tel. 050 460312
Booth no. 35
— Pyramids International Export and Import Commercial Agencies
Tel. 040 237605 Fax. 040 210319
Booth no. 32
— Al-Hoda for Export and Import
Tel. 2403823 Fax. 2403723
Booth no. 53
— Maged Hafez Mehanny for Electrical Equipment
Booth no. 21
Al-Amira for Clothes and Veils
Tel. 2509196 Fax. 2509196
Booth no. 5
— United Trade Company
Booth no. 34, 39, 41, 43, 45, 55-60

WORLD TRADE Center (WTC) Cairo, the huge complex overlooking the great Nile River, is considered one of the biggest and advanced trade centres, not only in Egypt, but also in the whole Middle East region.

Because of its flourishing trade activities, entertainment, businessmen's services and a successful management which is keen to offer more and more of these distinguished services, WTC Cairo is considered one of the most important WTCs in the world.

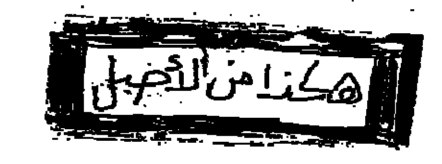
Mr Osama Fouad, WTC Cairo general manager, indicated that WTC Cairo is a regular member of the WTC Association, New York, which is linked with more than 320 WTCs in 97 countries all over the world via a very sophisticated communication system (WTC Network). This network provides all the necessary information related to international trade and assists most Egyptian businessmen to promote their services and facilities, and create new markets for their products.

The WTC Network is a very powerful source of information, especially now that it operates through the Internet.

Mr Fouad explained that WTC Cairo is the first WTC in the Middle East offering Internet services inside its premises, with WTC Cairo tenants having access to all the information they need. WTC Cairo also offers a complete range of services and facilities required by local and international businessmen through its business centre, i.e. secretarial services, ticket reservation, hotel accommodation, meet and assist at the airport, meeting room and temporary offices. WTC Cairo has two residential towers — one of the two is being managed by Hilton International as a five-star suite apartment hotel and the second one has different size apartments which are managed by WTC Cairo. Tenants of the two towers are entitled to use the swimming pool and the health club. There is also another office tower occupied by the Arab International Bank and multinational companies. A five-level podium building connects the three towers and has more than 120 shops, with restaurants located on the first three floors, while the other two floors each have 4,000 sq m. of office space, occupied by the United Nations Development Programme, the Saudi Commercial Attaché and multinational companies.

Mr Osama Fouad

Presently, efforts are being concentrated on the new extension of the WTC Cairo Shopping Mall, considered a new horizon in the Middle East since it will feature a cinema, a bowling alley, an entertainment centre with the most sophisticated equipment, 43 shops offering international and local brands, and a supermarket which will cater for all the needs of the Egyptian family.



New president for exchange

SHERIF Wahid Raafat, director of Concord International, a Cairo financial house, has been appointed as the new head of the Cairo and Alexandria stock exchanges. Raafat will take over from Abdel-Ghani Gamie who, according to official sources, stepped down for health reasons.

Raafat, a graduate of Cairo University's Faculty of Engineering, received his MBA in Canada, and has since held several executive positions in a number of international financial and brokerage firms. His appointment was welcomed by members of the financial community in Egypt, who lauded his experience in the market.

MIBank GDR sale

THE GLOBAL Depository Receipt (GDR) share issue for 20 per cent of Banque Misr's holdings in Misr International Bank (MIBank) closed six times oversubscribed on the London Stock Exchange last week. A total of eight million GDRs were sold at a value of $126 million. GDRs are receipts representing a certain number of shares, quoted in US dollars, and are traded on international markets. Each GDR issued by Banque Misr represents one tenth of a share.

The Banque Misr GDR issue succeeded in attracting not only European, and US investors, but also for the first time Asian investors.

According to Mohammed Ozalp, the general manager of MIBank, this is the first time that Misr International Bank (MIBank) ventures into international markets. Having its shares sold on the London Stock Exchange means that it is being recognised internationally.

Ozalp said that the importance of this GDR issue lies primarily in that strong, quality and long term investors are the buyers of the bank's shares, thereby benefiting the bank and the Egyptian economy. Moreover, according to Ozalp, processing and selling this issue has also given the management of the bank new insight and exposure to international standards. "It is definitely a worthwhile experience," he said. The market price for MIB's shares was originally evaluated at LE555 ($163), but the price was discounted slightly to LE553 ($162) to encourage buyers. Banque Misr's decision to sell part of its stake in MIBank comes within the framework of the government's privatisation policy to reduce the share holding of public sector banks in joint-venture banks. This transaction is the fourth time that Egyptian securities are traded on a foreign stock exchange. Previously the National Bank of Egypt (NBE) traded its holding in the Suez Cement Company. NBE had also sold part of its holdings of the Commercial International Bank (CIB) — a sale of roughly 20 per cent of CIB's total equity. Al-Ahram Beverages is another company which sold some of its shares in the form of GDR.

King cotton's crunch

Government set prices and higher than expected yields have undermined efforts to liberalise fully Egypt's cotton industry, reports **Gamal Essam El-Din**

Although Egypt's cotton industry was liberalised in 1994, the optimism which prevailed after the reforms in this key industry were soon dashed as a bevy of unexpected problems emerged. Among the many complaints by cotton traders and manufacturers following the liberalising of the industry is that the government still insists on regulating the market. The result, they argue, is that the cotton liberalisation policies, currently in their third year, have neither led to the opening of the door for the private sector, nor contributed to improving the export outlook for local exporters and manufacturers. In fact, claim critics, the situation has reached such critical levels that private sector involvement in cotton trade in the coming season is not expected to exceed one per cent, at best.

According to Cairo University Agricultural Economist Gamal Siam, the government's determination to set a high minimum guarantee price for cotton deliveries this season was the main reason why private cotton traders and cooperatives decided to withdraw from the market.

"The government, during the 1996-97 growing season, set a minimum guarantee price of LE500 per qantar of cotton — a figure that exceeded the international price by roughly LE100," said Siam. "This was a major mistake."

"In the 1995/96 season," he continued, "the private sector incurred a major loss of LE120 million because the government-set minimum guarantee price was LE140 higher than world rates. As a result, the private sector and cooperatives were forced to keep away from the market in the last season and are expected to do the same in the next season, as long as the government insists on dominating the market."

Minister of Trade and Supply Ahmed Guweili, addressing the Shura Council last April, explained that the government's objective behind setting a minimum guarantee price was to prevent cotton growers from falling victim to any monopolistic practices and to protect them from any drastic fluctuations in prices.

The government, due to the withdrawal of the private sector from the cotton market last season, had no option but to be responsible for receiving the majority of the cotton deliveries, said Siam. This move cost the government between LE500 and LE700 million in payments for the cotton deliveries.

"This figure is not only a massive drain on the state budget, but also shows that the government will continue to be a main player in the cotton market, at the expense of any liberalisation policies," he stated.

According to Mohamed Khalifa, chairman of the Cooperative Society of Cotton Producers (CSCP), the government really felt the financial pinch last year because the crop yield was too high. A report prepared by the CSCP noted that the area cultivated with cotton increased by 200,000 feddans to reach 920,000 feddans in the 1996-97 growing season.

This area produced a harvest of nearly 7.29 million qantars (a qantar is about 50kg) including an unsold surplus of 490,000 qantars from the previous season, said Khalifa, adding that until last month, exports were limited to 795,000 qantars and local mills purchased a mere 3.2 million qantars. The mills had purchased roughly 4.9 million qantars the year before. "This means that there is now a surplus stock of 3.3 million qantars," said Khalifa.

What really made a bad situation worse was that a glut of cotton on the world market resulted in a drastic decrease in prices. This opened the door for Pima cotton from the US to dominate the world cotton market, thereby reducing the demand for Egyptian extra-long staple varieties. The world cotton market, estimated at 6 million qantars, was flooded with around 2.5 million qantars of the American Pima cotton and another three million qantars from a group of Asian countries.

Zaki Edkawi, chairman of Edkawi Trading Trust Company, a large private cotton trading company based in Alexandria, agrees with Khalifa. The government's guarantee price "was in fact an umbrella for US Pima cotton to sell more on the world market," he said. In addition, this price made conditions so hard for the private cotton traders that a large number of them went bankrupt last season, noted Edkawi. He argued that the minimum guarantee price should not exceed LE400 per qantar in order to give the private sector an incentive and a reasonable profit margin on sales.

On the part of local manufacturers, the government-set guarantee price was also more than a disaster. Abdel-Hakim Haggag, chairman of the Holding Spinning, Weaving and Ready-made Garments Company (HSWRGC), said that the cotton guarantee price last year was set so high that local mills incurred sharp increases in production costs that came at the expense of their financial liquidity.

"Local mills had to pay as much as LE230 million for the 3.7 million qantars they were able to buy in the last cotton season," said Haggag. He emphasised that unless the cotton's delivery price is reduced by the government next season, local mills will either turn to importing cheaper cotton or to increasing the use of synthetics.

"We are not against paying Egyptian farmers a high price for their cotton deliveries, but we emphasise that delivery prices should be set in light of world cotton prices," he stated.

In a bid to solve these problems, Khalifa called on the government to take the initiative of drafting a law that establishes a fund for balancing cotton prices. This fund, he added, was supposed to be on the list of laws aimed at liberalising the cotton market in 1994. "But for no known reasons, this law did not come up at all before parliament," he said. Haggag also contends that this fund is imperative as a means of offering an indirect subsidy to local mills, and to compensate exporters in case the guarantee price is higher than the export price. It would also serve to generate more revenue in case the export price was higher than the guarantee price.

Khalifa also argued that the government, if really serious in liberalising the cotton market, should give the private sector and cooperatives the right to establish their own cotton collection sites where they will be free to buy cotton from farmers.

Currently, there are around 974 cotton collection sites throughout Egypt, and most of them are dominated by the government-owned Principal Bank for Development and Agricultural Credit (PBDAC).

Adding his own suggestion to the list of necessary steps, Edkawi stated that the private sector's main request for the new season is that the price of cotton should be determined by free market forces. He added that the price of extra-long staple Giza 75 cotton should be set at 7-8 per cent less than that of US Pima for the next three seasons. Reducing the price, he argued, is imperative if Egypt is to regain its cotton markets in Japan and Europe. "It is better to lose some money for a short period than to lose a market for a long time," said Edkawi. "Markets which are lost are hard to regain."

Multinational giants hound Egyptian pirates



Many Egyptian computer firms have taken the liberty of raiding the intellectual property of others, reports **Shereen Abdel-Razek**

Four Egyptian software firms are facing charges of pirating and illegally selling the software of several international computer giants. The suit, filed by a number of international software titans including Microsoft, has brought to the limelight the disturbing increase of intellectual property rights violations in Egypt. Under Law 38 of 1993, which was an amendment to the copyright law of 1954, the rights to computer programmes are protected for 50 years from their date of registration, and may not be copied without prior permission from the company which owns the rights. The penalty for copyright infringement of software ranges from a three-year prison sentence and a LE10,000 fine to the total closure of the company.

This restriction, however, has done little to temper the increase in software piracy seen over the last couple of years. Mohamed El-Beri, a lawyer at the Shalakani Law Office which is handling the suit for the multinational computer firms, said his firm has already compiled a list of 72 companies in just six governorates which are using pirated software. And that is just the tip of the iceberg.

El-Beri noted that according to reports prepared by the Business Software Alliance (BSA), an organisation whose members are drawn from the ranks of all major software producers, 88 of every 100 software applications used in Egypt are pirated. Moreover, he stated, with software sales in Egypt decreasing by 50 per cent over the last year, international software firms sustained losses of $18.1 million last year, up from $8.2 million in 1994.

Others, however, argue that these claims are exaggerated. While not denying the increase in software piracy, Mostafa El-Said, head of the Ministry of Supply and Trade's International Trade Department, said that "on a global level, the rate of software piracy in Egypt is neither high nor low."

"If computer programmes and software are priced reasonably, no one will copy them," he argued.

But exaggerated or not, the net effect of this illegal trade in Egypt is nothing but more trouble. Egypt has already earned the dubious distinction of being placed on the American Priority Watch List of all countries lacking adequate and effective intellectual property rights measures. This kind of black mark carries with it several consequences, all of which are dire for a country seeking to woo foreign investment and cement the foundations of a free market system.

"Egypt's inclusion on this list might have negative implications for its bilateral economic relations," said El-Beri.

Software piracy, stated Hossam Lotfi of the Shalakani Law Office, has reached dangerous levels in Egypt. "Daily newspapers run ads by computer companies willing to copy and sell programmes," he said. "Although this is illegal under Egyptian law, no one ever moves to stop it."

Part of the reason for the lack of action on the part of Egyptian authorities is that they misinterpret the grace period preceding the implementation of the WTO's Trade-Related aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPs), said Lotfi. The agreement is scheduled to go into force in January 2000, but many officials believe that Egypt is not committed to protect intellectual property rights until that date.

Voicing similar concerns to those of El-Beri, Khaled Awad, general manager of Microsoft, Egypt, argued that piracy not only undermines production in Egypt, but also encourages international computer firms to take their investments elsewhere. And, to an extent, El-Beri and Awad's predictions are already beginning to come true. Last week, Nascom, an Indian software manufacturing company, withdrew its $100 million-a-year subcontract offer to produce software in Egypt. Nascom's decision came after its market research revealed that software piracy is rampant in Egypt, and that intellectual property rights are seldom protected.

Similarly, two weeks ago one major international software company preferred Abu Dhabi to Egypt as the location where it will manufacture the Arabic version of its programme. Abu Dhabi, which has a very limited market in comparison to that of Egypt, has managed to reduce piracy rates by 16 per cent over the last year while Egypt's rate increased by 8 per cent for the same period.

Sweet factories turn sour

A glucose tax on sweet factories has raised the blood pressure of confectioners. **Zeinab Abul-Gheit** reports

Sweet factories and the Tax Authority (TA) are locked in a dispute over the glucose tax which the former claim undermines their profitability and curbs their ability to compete abroad. The conflict started in 1995 when the TA discarded its system of refundable sales taxes, replacing it with a LE58.60 tax on every ton of glucose used in production.

Rizk Ahmed, deputy chairman of the board of the Egyptian General Society for Sales Tax, said that the new tax is fair. Before the liberalisation of the economy, he pointed out, the Supply Ministry provided producers with production needs and the TA was able, thereby, to know the exact level of their production and tax them accordingly.

But once the market was liberalised, the TA had no foolproof way of ascertaining the companies' tax reports and the glucose tax, which is levied according to weight of the finished product, was introduced to curb tax evasion.

But the tax, the companies argue, hurt their competitiveness. Magdi Zaki, executive manager of Sima said that the new tax hit large companies harder. According to the 1991 tax law, factories whose annual sales are below LE54,000 are exempted from tax. To evade taxes, some factories doctor their books to ensure that the stated revenue of sales is always under this sum, he claimed. Zaki said that his company suffered a loss in profits as a result of the glucose tax. The company, he pointed out, cannot raise the price of its products due to domestic and foreign competition and its exports to countries such as the Ukraine, Romania and Russia have dropped by 10 per cent. The producers, Zaki said, have appealed to the TA to reconsider the glucose tax, but their appeal went unanswered.

Most producers concur with Zaki. Ali Haddad Hassan, owner of a sweet factory in Ain Shams, said that the tax has hurt his factory's ability to compete and that his factory now operates only two or three days a week.

Abdel-Hamid Masoud, owner of Shami Pastry Factory, pointed out that factories based in new industrial areas have been exempt from taxes, which gives them an unfair advantage over their counterparts in other locations. Masoud urged the government to exempt exporters from the tax.

The return

In commemoration of the 30th anniversary of Ras El-Esh, the first decisive Egyptian victory in the six-year round of Israeli-Arab wars which began in 1967, Fawzi Mansour remembers the ad hoc force he led to Port Fouad in a last-ditch attempt to save the city — and the mothers handing their children to the victorious soldiers

"What is this balance of forces you are talking about, professor? A dime's worth of electricity could have forced a decision in the contest between the internal patriotic and reactionary forces."

I was not accustomed to interruptions when holding forth in public on grave national issues. Nerves were too frayed and the general situation was too sensitive for a biting retort: it was 20 June 1967, nearly two weeks after the catastrophic defeat. Besides, I did not immediately grasp the significance of the question. The young man was standing at the far end of the long, narrow hall, his handsome, sensitive face contrasting sharply with his harsh words and trembling voice.

Later, I learned that his name was Abdel-Rahman Ali. A brilliant TV star, he died prematurely in the early nineties, of heart-break I am sure, whatever the diagnosis the doctors may have written on his death certificate.

"Nasser could have taken a jeep to the TV building," he continued, "and talked directly to the people. He could have said: 'I need your help to save your country. I cannot do it alone. The domestic forces responsible for the defeat are entrenched in important positions in the armed forces, the economy and society at large, even in the Socialist Union. They refuse to quit and let me do whatever is needed to rebuild our armed forces, make them truly one with the people, abolish all special privileges and illegitimate sources of power. To do that I need you to take to the streets and squares in every city and town once *again*, show your determination that change must take place and stay on your guard until it has been completed.' Do you think, professor, that if Nasser had been able and willing to do that, anybody would have dared to stand in his way?"

In the audience were influential writers, radio and TV commentators and other intellectuals. I had been asked by the leadership of the Socialist Union to give a talk reassuring them that, although no radical change had taken place yet, things would never be the same as they had been before, and no effort was being spared to put the country's affairs in order. I thought it was necessary to give more than a pep talk and explain that Nasser's hands were tied, which I believed at the time. Rumours about conflict in the higher ranks of the army, especially between Nasser and Field-Marshall Amer, gave credence to that explanation.

The meeting was not the first of its kind. Previously, I had been asked to go on a tour of the main towns of Upper Egypt in a bid to quell misgivings and raise morale. I was accompanied on this tour by Estefan Bassili, an ex-deputy speaker of Parliament and member of the Wafd Party, who became a high official of the Socialist Union in the sixties. In the early fifties, at the instigation of the Wafd leadership, he had introduced a bill imposing penalties — harsh by the mild standards of that time — for the crime of lèse-majesté against King Farouk. The bill created a great uproar, not least in his own household where, it was rumoured, he was denied bed and board. His own daughters condemned him in public. This man, a genuine democrat who had been waylaid by his party leaders, had to withdraw the infamous bill. Fifteen years later, when we met for the first time for the tour of Upper Egypt, I thought I detected a patina of chronic contrition on his elderly, kind face.

The meetings followed an identical pattern: following an introduction by the governor and the secretary of the Socialist Union, each of us gave a speech, to be followed by a discussion. The audience, mostly notables in the magnificent black coats of Upper Egypt immortalised in Shadi Abdel-Salam's film *Night of Counting the Years*, asked few questions and made fewer comments. They appeared to support the president and his regime and to agree with whatever we said. I was not deceived by their unfailing *Sa'idi* courtesy, for I could not fail to see, in the hundreds of faces in front of me, an unforgettable, involuntary look of deep reproach, the look a gentleman of good breeding gives to a close friend who has betrayed his trust. There was little evident response to my explanations of why such a resounding defeat had taken place in such a short time, and why nothing was yet to be seen indicating a real change of course. Those nights, my inability to sleep was not caused only by the heat of Upper Egypt in mid-June.

My next performance was less taxing. I entered Marsa Matrouh in a chauffeur-driven car lent by the Alexandria Socialist Union, which was completely stripped of any trace of glass, for the car, taking advantage of a little nap the driver was having, had chosen a particularly inviting bend of the road to make a triple somersault, ending upright on its wheels. My own lot was a minor concussion. Our various injuries did not prevent us, passenger, chauffeur and car, from continuing the journey. The sight of our entrance into Marsa Matrouh in that Don-Quichotte/Sancho Panza-and-lame-horse fashion must have softened the receiving line of dignitaries waiting for us, for they were so solicitous as to behave as if they were convinced by everything I said.

Not that I did not believe it myself. I was conscious at the time of the class and other antagonisms which Nasser's experiment with socialism was bound to encounter immediately following the catastrophic events of 5-11 June. The political right and its social foundations had become more apparent, but was not openly contested by the regime, so that in dealing with the question on everybody's mind — why necessary changes were not taking place with the required speed — I was convinced that the balance of forces dictated great caution and tactical skill, if the progress led by Nasser was to prevail.

Thirty years later, despite the unprecedented vote of confidence which Nasser received on 9 June, I still think that, had he proceeded to introduce the revolution then needed not just to win the war, but to make a counter-revolution impossible, he might have seriously endangered himself and his regime. The fact is that, when the immediate contest with the Amer camp was won, the real changes — in the economy, in the structure of government and in the Socialist Union — went to the right rather than to the left. Perhaps the forces of reaction were too strong to dislodge; perhaps Nasser did not have sufficient information about those who really supported him; perhaps he was afraid to split the country beyond repair and thus endanger, or maybe even lose, the loyalty of the war machine he was building; perhaps he took for granted the support of his own people and valued the support of the rich reactionary Arab countries more than the rejuvenating impact of real revolutionary changes on the Egyptians and on progressive forces everywhere in the Arab world. Or perhaps there were ingrained limitations in Nasser's vision of what he could do, or what he would have liked to do. I doubt whether history, the so-called ultimate judge, will ever be able to solve this riddle.

In any case, when I was dispatched from Marsa Matrouh to explain the situation to the group of intellectuals in Cairo, I was as convinced of the balance-of-forces argument as ever. Then came the verbal grenade flung at me by Abdel-Rahman Ali: "What balance of forces are you talking about, when a dime's worth of electricity could have settled everything?"

Against my deeper convictions, his argument threw me off balance. Perhaps it was his intensity, his youthful appearance and his audacity that made me temporarily lose sight of all the other imponderables which made such a course of action, in a time of war, a risky proposition. So I terminated the meeting in as decent a way as I could, and vowed to decline further invitations to explain 'the present situation'. Since I had no other meaningful choice, I decided to join the popular resistance forces in the Suez Canal zone. My heart was set on going to Port Said.

The commander of the Popular Resistance Forces (CPRF) in Port Said was a former army officer who had gained some experience in organising resistance to British occupation forces in the Suez Canal zone, both in 1953 and following the Tripartite Aggression, in 1956. Since 1952, most of his career had been in the General Intelligence Service. I later discovered that his first assignment in that service was to keep an eye on communists. All I knew about him in 1967 was that he was right-wing. For my part, I had acquired a certain notoriety as a leftist. Some string-pulling was needed to have him accept me in his team. Also, there was some divergence in our respective views as to how popular resistance could best be organised. I believed in people's will to resist and capacity for taking initiative, while he tended to rely more on professionals. Otherwise, he had many endearing qualities: he was kind, modest, had simple tastes, shunned the life of luxury and did not throw his weight around.

I was mostly involved in organising the training of volunteers for in-town fighting, and of workers from the big industrial establishments — notably the famous Port Said shipbuilding facility — for the defence of their work places.

Volunteers were trained in a special camp, set up by the National Guard and run by regular army officers. A continuous stream of people flowed to that camp, from all walks of life, from all parts of the country. They varied in age from the young, which was natural, to the relatively old, which was particularly comforting to me. I have noticed that — contrary to expectations — the older one gets, the more one values one's life, and the keener one is to preserve it. Perhaps it is increased awareness, or a greater curiosity about how things — the world, the country, the family — will develop. So I tend to evaluate the seriousness of an endeavour in comparison to the age of the group engaged in it. I know it is almost a sacrilege, but I was never much impressed by a national liberation movement which relies mainly on children. In Port Said, we had no shortage of elderly people wanting to join. For obvious reasons, however, we had to choose the fittest. These were mostly the young, of whom there was never any shortage. In fact the main problem was how to turn them away.

The training facilities were woefully inadequate in terms of weapons, ammunition, instructors, etc. Probably most of what was needed was lost in Sinai, and the regular army had first priority in the little that was left. I received a certificate of excellence in the use of guns and machine guns, having fired five shots with the one and a few with the other, none of which hit the target. With the help of another trainee I fired a projectile from an RPG into the horizon above the sea and this was considered sufficient training in anti-tank weaponry.

The on-site training of workers was no more uplifting. Mostly it consisted of speeches to hundreds of assembled workers on the importance of initiative, self-reliance, inventiveness, cooperation among small independent units and making use of available material. Engineers and technicians who were part of the team of the CPRF huddled with their counterparts in arsenals and factories to devise technical means of combating the enemy: placing an under-water chain near the sea entrance to the arsenal, electrifying certain obstacles on attack routes, etc.

The evenings were the most depressing of all. They were usually spent with regular army officers, either attached to the National Defence Forces or certain residual units of the regular army. The two subjects that seem to have been most frequently discussed in those gatherings were the talents of various soothsayers and fortune tellers residing in Gaza and consulted even by high-ranking officers, and stories of various army personnel still infiltrating through enemy lines in Sinai to Port Said. Some came on foot and some in fishing boats, some wearing *galabiyas* and others their uniforms. Some — of various ranks — had abandoned their comrades in order to save their own lives, while others never relinquished their command or failed to give a helping hand to a needy superior, subordinate or colleague.

I was continually reminded of the three-week march a brother of mine had to make on foot from Gaza to Ismailiya in the 1956 war. He returned, at the head of his platoon, machine gun in hand, and barefoot, albeit in uniform. All in all, I had five brothers and a sister involved in the various Israeli-Arab wars. Under the clear skies of Port Said at night, I felt uncomfortable listening to the officers' stories, told in even, neutral and bemused tones. I did not like it.

Overnight all this changed, took on a different meaning for me, acquired greater significance or faded into nothingness.

On 1 July the CPRF decided to go to Cairo. By mid-afternoon, however, he was back, with the information that an Israeli armoured column was marching along the western side of the Suez Canal towards Port Fouad. If he knew that certain Egyptian army units stood in the way of this northward thrust, I am sure we were not informed of it. A few minutes later I learned that an order was issued, probably on instructions from Cairo, for the complete evacuation of all civilians from the already half-deserted Port Fouad. I vehemently protested the policy of evacuating civilian centres before invading armies, much more vehemently than my official standing with the Port Said PRF would warrant. After some argument I was ordered to collect as many of the PRF personnel and weapons as possible and assume command of this ad hoc force. I knew of no other forces, regular or otherwise, stationed in Port Fouad. I am not sure that I was given this singular honour because the commander was convinced by my argument that the Israelis should never be allowed to march into an open Egyptian city, or because I made myself so notorious that the kindly man saw no other way of pacifying me.

A choice had to be made — amid much protestation — among so many volunteers. It was based not on the level of training, since there was hardly any effective training, but on knowledge of the terrain. The number was strictly limited to the rifles and machine guns available, which, for the first time, were distributed to members of the force. In Egypt, civilians are never entrusted with weapons except in extreme situations, presumably lest they hurt themselves. The real leader of the group was a member of the Port Said Socialist Union Executive Committee, Abdel-Moneim El-Sha'er. He assumed leadership not by appointment but by aptitude, and he went about his business in a quiet, unassuming way. He was probably a school teacher. Over the years I have always wondered where he was, what he was doing, and how he felt about various events.

We took the last ferry to Port Fouad. A police officer, introducing himself as a member of the State Security Department, asked who we were and where we were going. He wrote down the details of my identity card and, without a word, let us take the outward journey, the only passengers on the ferry.

It was dusk when we landed in Port Fouad. Abdel-Moneim led us to a school in which we set up headquarters; it had a working telephone, which established a tenuous link with the CPRF in Port Said. During that fateful night I do not recollect having encountered any higher authority.

The easiest of my responsibilities was to decide on the disposition of the forces. I knew that there were five primitive trenches forming a semicircle around the southern part of the town. With the exception of a few "aides de camp" headed by the indispensable Abdel-Moneim, the force was dispatched to man these trenches. Lacking knowledge of any intercepting Egyptian defence forces, the real dilemma, especially for a civilian, was what orders to give my untrained young men. Deep down I knew that my task was political: not to allow the Israelis to enter Port Fouad and occupy it without loss. On the other hand, I was not keen on a "massacre of the innocents" on political grounds. So, after much soul-searching, my order was to deal with the unprotected personnel of the advancing enemy (e.g. those riding on motorbikes or jeeps). Otherwise, if it was entirely composed of completely protected personnel (in tanks and armoured cars) our entrenched forces were to withdraw as discreetly as possible, hide in small groups in villas and houses near the Israelis' probable quarters, and inflict on the enemy as many losses as possible at whatever cost.

Until about midnight the atmosphere at "headquarters" was extremely tense. We were all trying to hide the symptoms of a growing sense of an inevitable unequal battle. I was the most fear-stricken of them all: the awesome responsibility of endangering the lives of so many young, trusting and inexperienced men weighed uncomfortably upon me.

Between the hourly trips I made to and from the trenches, the darkest of thoughts found time to fester. At about midnight the anxiety was relieved when a powerful explosion rent the air, followed by many others of different magnitudes. I rushed with some colleagues to the trenches where, at regular intervals, a beautiful red-orange glow illuminated the southern horizon for a second or two, then slowly faded away, accompanied by a deafening crash. The meaning became instantly clear to us: the Israelis were not enjoying a free ride to Port Fouad. Much later, I learnt that the assaulting force was composed of ten tanks reinforced by an infantry squadron and an engineers' unit assisted by fighter bombers. Unbeknownst to us, nearly 20km to the south and the east of Port Fouad were stationed small units of the Egyptian select *sa'ika* and infantry, small units of anti-tank artillery reinforced on the west bank of the Suez Canal. In spite of repeated air reinforcements and attempts at a circular movement along the Mediterranean coast to the north of Port Fouad, the enemy suffered a resounding defeat. The attempt was not repeated. That site, in the words of General Fawzi, remained our only foothold in the Sinai until 1973. It was not just a question of valour, regaining self-confidence: it was a victory of foresight, planning and precise execution, the first of its kind, over ingrained sloppiness. That day I acquired a new conviction, never to be shaken again: inefficiency in every public domain, especially in national politics, is worse than treason, for whereas treason can easily be identified and dealt with, inefficiency — whatever its origin — is contagious and difficult to eradicate.

At this time, though, we in Port Fouad did not know that we had won. Commuting between the southern trenches and our headquarters in Port Fouad, with no information from our 'Command' in Port Said, we had no clear view of what was happening. So when the thunder suddenly ceased at dawn, it sounded very ominous. Our anxiety was not relieved by the clinking sound of approaching tanks. We carefully ventured into the main streets of Port Fouad to find out what was happening. In a little square we saw a small group of Egyptians, four or five, in civilian clothes. Among them was Mohamed Abdel-Meguid Mohieddin. At the time, it was the habit of close relatives of public figures to go into public service rather than "business". They were all former army officers who had become members of the prestigious Administrative Control, and who had formed an independent unit of popular resistance volunteers. They told us what had happened. We were so relieved that a bullet shot inadvertently from the rifle of a young member of our group, whizzing between my nose and the nose of a member of the other group. As far as I can remember this was the only shot fired by a member of the PRF that night, and the Mohieddin group, which we met at dawn, were the only people we saw there.

We crossed the Canal as quietly as we could to see the tanks whose click-clack in Port Said we could still hear. We hardly saw them: having been forcefully stopped by the inhabitants, they had almost totally disappeared under mountains of flowers, trays of food, sweets and drinks. Most unforgettably, babies were thrown by their mothers into the welcoming arms of the tank crews.

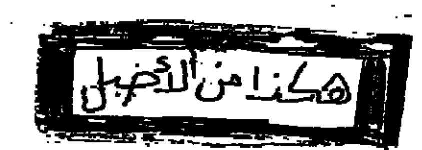
My view of recent events began to change: I suddenly remembered that both Alexander and Napoleon were also in the habit of consulting oracles and soothsayers. The insouciance with which the officers had discussed the various war incidents on previous nights became strangely similar to the conduct of the only professional — and quite capable — soldier in Bernard Shaw's *Arms and the Man*. And behind the good-natured, ineffectual, demoralising humour of my countrymen and women when faced with saddening national news or flagrant public misconduct, I saw a combination of awareness and quick response which made them take to the streets by the millions on 9 June 1967.

At present it is very hard to be Egyptian, what with singers wailing all the time on TV, without any apparent provocation, "I love you Egypt, I love you Egypt," and politicians, MPs, journalists and writers with bulging eyes and pockets swearing that they would rather die that give away a "particle of Egyptian dust" — dust, mind you, not earth, when everybody knows that no greater bliss could befall Egypt than the removal of the dust which fills its streets, houses, nostrils and consciences. The inevitable TV images attesting to the unique beauty of Egypt — a bit of the Nile with a felucca peacefully gliding by, a few palm trees swaying in the wind, two pyramids and the Sphinx, the minarets of the Citadel's mosques are repeated ad infinitum, to obliterate, I suppose, from the arriving tourists' consciousness the sight of the gigantic villages spreading year after year like huge pimples on an adolescent's face, swallowing up the greenery of the Delta and the valley — for Egyptians count for less and less when it comes to demonstrating the beauty of Egypt.

It is even harder to be Egyptian if, in addition, you have acquired a memory, however dim and romantic, of Egypt's long history, both sides of it: the glorious side, the invention of art and morality, peasants challenging tyrants with homilies on justice and good governance which still echo down the corridors of time or revolting for centuries on end; and the inglorious side — the long centuries of servility to tyrants, local and foreign.

If, in addition, you have had some, but not too much, intimacy with peasants so that only their kindness, generosity, simple wisdom, essential humanity, sense of honour and values, and their quiet despair stand out, then being an Egyptian at the present time becomes an even more painful experience.

On that early morning of 2 July in Port Said, however, these dark thoughts did not fill my mind. Probably the women I saw placing their babies into the arms of the victorious but tired soldiers were not aware of it, but I saw in this instinctive gesture the delivery of Egypt's fate to a new generation. For every baby represents an unlimited potentiality. Egypt, which was forever being crucified and recrucified, was waiting for a new resurrection by a new generation. It is still waiting.



A post-Islamist society?

As the revolution's promises begin to ring hollow, writes **Asef Bayat**, some Iranians are attempting to save Islam as a faith by dismantling Islam as a political system. New intellectual and social trends, as well as a growing constituency of dissenters, are placing increasing pressure on the regime. Will the clergy leave politics to the politicians? Or will the supreme jurist have the last laugh?



The face of the future? Post-Islamism seems to have emerged as a way out for marginalised and alienated segments of Iranian society. Women, young people and intellectuals are among those who have suffered the most from the contradictions inherent to the Islamic state, and who stand to benefit the most from the secular concepts of authenticity being offered by some enlightened figures *(photo: Reuters)*

Oliver Roy's contention that "political Islam has failed" does not mean the end of Islamist activism and discourse. Indeed, more than at any other time, the global political language is filled with discussions about Islam and Islamic activism. Politics in Muslim societies is still predominantly religious, and the Islamic movements still constitute the major opposition to governments. An imagined Islamic threat to the West explains Western interest in the subject. The belief that Islam offers a solution to social, political and economic ills is what attracts the Muslims.

Surprisingly, while Islamic discourse permeates politics in most Muslim societies, in Iran, the first modern Islamic state, people seem preoccupied with secular concerns; Islamic language in politics seems to be waning. In fact, Iran is moving toward a new "post-Islamist" phase. What are the features of this "post-Islamist phase?" What are the causes behind the transition? It is probably too early to provide definitive answers. The phenomenon, however, is very significant, and the observations put forth here are meant to stimulate further discussion. Before describing the post-Islamist phase, though, it is necessary to understand what Islamism has been in Iran.

The Islamist phase began with the revolution of February 1979. The establishment of the first Islamic state in modern times set the stage for a gradual Islamisation of society. The process was enforced largely from above, often through violence. The chief characteristic of Iranian Islamism was the creation of an Islamic government based on a modern notion of *vilayat-i-faqih*, the guardianship of the canon law jurist, who is to rule the community of the believers in the absence of the twelfth Shi'i imam. According to Iran's 1979 Constitution, all the laws of the land must conform to Islamic principles. Of course, a parliament does exist, but the laws enacted by elected deputies can be modified or over-ruled by a Council of Guardians, a 12-member body of canon law jurists appointed by the *Faqih*. This council vetoes any legislation deemed to conflict with Islamic values. The establishment of the Islamic government also meant a change in symbols and slogans. Iran's flag and national anthem, for example, were modified to become Islamic. The internationalisation of the Islamic order, or pan-Islamism, accounted for another aspect of the New Iran.

Islamism should be seen in terms of a systematic attempt from above to Islamicise society and the economy. In the early 1980s, a cultural revolution was launched to transform the educational system in Iran, from universities down to pre-school nurseries. The idea was to set up a religious curriculum, employ Islamically-committed instructors, and add Islamic extra-curricular activities. The aim was to produce and reproduce Islamic citizens.

Compulsory *hijab* (veiling) for women in the early 1980s was the most drastic measure that gave religious identity to post-revolutionary Iranian women. *Hijab* has been particularly significant as it is a highly visible Islamic symbol. Along with the forced veiling of women and surveillance of men, many liberal laws that had come into existence under the deposed shah were revoked. These included family law, as well as employment and education policies favouring women. Day care centres and family planning programmes were condemned as imperialist conspiracies; polygamy was tolerated, and men automatically received custody of children and the right to divorce. The imposition of a quota system effectively barred women from studying certain college courses and restricted their numbers in others. These changes were accompanied by a pervasive Islamisation of leisure — of drinking habits, dress, music, movies, television programmes, videos, holidays and satellite dishes.

From the very first days of the revolution, there was a quest for an "Islamic economy" — one which was to be based on "Islamic justice" (*qist-i-Islami*), an economy that would be neither capitalist nor socialist. Its cornerstone was a redefinition of property rights, or *mashru'a* capital. Achieving the prosperity of the *mustaz'afin*, the deprived, was its objective. Dozens of seminars were organised to discuss the issue of Islamic economics. Although no definite answer was agreed upon, those policies that were undisputed and practical were implemented. Banking interest was removed in theory, labour laws changed, Islamic prayers were enforced in the workplace, "un-Islamic" businessmen were removed, jailed or saw their capital confiscated, and foreign investment was discouraged. These measures caused business insecurity and a sharp drop in investment and productive activities. The need to respond to these trends caused a debate between the "specialists" (*takhassosgeraian*) and the *maktabis*. The former, representing President Abolhasan Bani Sadr, emphasised expert knowledge in dealing with economic and technical issues. The *maktubis* stressed the importance of Islamic/ideological commitment. During the early 1980s, the *maktabi* view was quite predominant. Islam was considered a complete social, economic, political and moral system containing the answers to all human problems. It was up to the "true" Muslims, through resiliency and commitment, to discover them. Such a monopoly on truth meant that there was no room for the coexistence of competing views or systems. Islamism was exclusivist and intolerant of pluralism.

The Islamist phase prevailed throughout the 1980s. The war with Iraq, where Islamic symbols were utilised fully (the war of *haqq* against *batil*, or Islam against unbelief), contributed to the prevalence of this phase. Although a large segment of the population opposed Islamism from the outset, the state and society nevertheless had its own support base. The support came largely from among the urban poor, the traditional urban petty-bourgeoisie, some rural youth, and a segment of the modern middle classes. Many urban youth were integrated through the war effort, via such Revolutionary Institutions (*nahadha-ye inqilabi*) as the *pasdaran*, *baseej*, and the *Jihad-i-Sazandegi*. The state hoped that the Islamisation of schools would reproduce this critical mass of supporters. This support base was inspired by the personality of Ayatollah Khomeini while he was alive. With the end of the war in 1988, and the death of Khomeini the following year, however, a new phase began to unfold. It was inaugurated by a comprehensive programme of post-war reconstruction, which marked the beginning of what might be termed post-Islamism.

By "post-Islamism" I mean a condition where, following a phase of experimentation, the appeal, energy, symbols and sources of legitimacy of Islamism are exhausted, even among its once-ardent supporters. As such, post-Islamism is not anti-Islamic, but rather reflects a tendency toward the re-secularisation of religion. In contemporary Iran, post-Islamism is expressed in the idea of a fusion between Islam (as a personalised faith) and individual freedom and choice. Post-Islamism is associated with the values of democracy and aspects of modernity. It is expressed in the idea that Islam does not have answers to all societies' social, political, and economic problems. Post-Islamism implies an understanding that, not only is Islam compatible with modernity, but its very survival as a religion depends upon achieving this compatibility. Yet the quest is for an independent modernity.

Post-Islamism may be summed up in the phrase "we don't mind destroying mosques in order to build freeways." Even among committed Muslims, post-Islamism expresses just such a state of mind: a tendency toward rationalisation. It is manifested in the acknowledgement of secular exigencies, freedom from rigidity, the dismantling of the monopoly on religious truth, the gradual retreat of the sacred and the expansion of the profane. Of course, Ayatollah Khomeini expressed similar sentiments when he "absolutised" the Islamic state. His destruction of mosques, however, was justified by a greater sacred, not secular, cause.

In contemporary Iran, a number of interesting social phenomena represent post-Islamist trends. Three of the most significant include the redevelopment of the Tehran municipality and its socio-spatial rationale; the Alternative Thought Movement; and Islamic feminism.

Since 1989, Gholamhossain Karbaschi has been redesigning the city of Tehran. The capital has assumed a new character, which does not have much to do with the image of an Islamic city. Its spatial configuration and symbolism — freeways, huge commercial billboards, and shopping malls — remind a visitor more of Madrid or even Los Angeles than of Karbala or Qom. There are no signs of those hastily scrawled revolutionary slogans and earnest posters which, during the early 1980s, covered almost every empty wall in the city. These have all given way to advertisements as well as a handful of officially-sanctioned slogans, adorned impressively by colourful designs and portraits.

Splendid cultural centres have been set up, in both the affluent north and the poor south of Tehran, catering to the arts, music and modern technology. Western and Iranian classical music are tremendously popular among young people. Over 75 per cent of concert-goers are young men and women. Although forced veiling and gender segregation are still enforced by the state, the municipality's 500 newly constructed parks bring together in public space not only various social classes, but also, more importantly, adults and teenagers of both sexes. There are other spatial arrangements that facilitate the breakdown of segregation barriers, including mountain climbing and skiing in North Tehran, not to mention bike-riding in the man-made forests around the city.

The mayor has become one of the most popular politicians in the country. He even has a daily newspaper, *Hamshahri*, which has colour photographs and has overtaken all the established papers in two short years. The paper covers overwhelmingly secular concerns such as culture, art, citizen complaints and urban life. It is on the newsstands every day, but street vendors are still able to re-sell it for twice its official price.

At the intellectual level, the most dramatic manifestation of post-Islamism is a new movement, *Andisheh-ye Diger*, or Alternative Thought, led by a professor of philosophy, Abdul-Karim Soroush. A former ideologue of the Islamic state with a doctorate from London University, Soroush is well-versed both in Western science and philosophy and in Islam, especially jurisprudence. He is more sophisticated in these areas than Ali Shariati (1933-77), the pre-eminent Islamist ideologue in the years leading up to the 1979 Revolution.

The Alternative Thought Movement is neither anti-Islamic nor secular, but seeks to redefine the capabilities of religion in the modern age to address complex human needs. Epistemologically, it calls for a hermeneutic reading of the Qur'an, rejecting a single "true reading," or, for that matter, an exclusive "expert reading" by the *ulama*. In fact, the Alternative Thought Movement seeks to end the professionalisation of religious interpretation by the clergy, who subsist thanks to their monopoly on religious knowledge.

Informed by enlightenment thought, the movement serves as an implicit critique of the idea of *vilayat-i-faqih*, the rule of the supreme jurist, which is the basis of the Islamic state in Iran. It argues that the management of modern societies is both possible and desirable not through religion, but through scientific rationality in a democratic structure. Soroush not only believes that Islam and democracy are compatible, but that their association is inevitable. In effect, the Alternative Thought Movement calls for the establishment of a secular democratic state that accommodates Islam as a faith.

Soroush explicitly rejects the idea of *al-Islam huwa al-hall* (Islam is the solution), a popular slogan among contemporary Islamist movements in the Arab world. For him, religions are limited in providing answers to all human problems. In fact, religions are the domain, not of mundane concerns, but of mystery, perplexity, love and devotion. Religious faith, nevertheless, must be encouraged because, according to Soroush, it makes life tolerable by enabling humans to cope with the harsh realities of life and because it can provide mechanisms of self-control, just as democracy facilities external control.

The Alternative Thought Movement enjoys widespread support among youth, the educated, and both religious-minded and secular Iranians, especially the modern middle-classes, many of whom had been marginalised politically. Perhaps more importantly, Soroush has gained a significant following among theology students, greater than that of any senior cleric. These young ulama are concerned about both religion as an institution and their future; they feel the basis of their prerogatives and legitimacy is being eroded amid growing anti-clericalism in society.

The ideas propounded by these *degarandishan* (alternative thinkers), as they are called in Iran, are being spread through lectures, symposiums, international conferences, books, articles, and, especially, the monthly *Kiyan*. Of course, similar ideas can be found among Islamic modernists such as Mohamed Arkoun, Hassan Hanafi or even the secularist Nasr Hamed Abu Zeid in Egypt. Originality, however, is not the issue here; rather, what is important is that these ideas have gained popularity under the rule of a self-consciously Islamic state.

'Post-Islamism is not anti-Islamic, but rather reflects a tendency toward the re-secularisation of religion. In contemporary Iran, post-Islamism is expressed in the idea of a fusion between Islam (as a personalised faith) and individual freedom and choice. Post-Islamism is associated with the values of democracy and aspects of modernity. It is expressed in the idea that Islam does not have answers to all societies' social, political, and economic problems'

A third trend in Iran's post-Islamism is an "Islamic feminist" movement that has emerged within the framework of the Alternative Thought Movement. The activists, familiar with both Western feminist debates and Qur'anic teachings, are struggling within the Islamic discourse to revoke those anti-women laws and practices that are said to have religious justifications.

Relying on the slogan "equality of men and women in Islam," which has been accepted by clerical leaders, this movement has made considerable progress in its effort to empower women in the domain of employment, education and family law.

The stereotypes of Iranian women in the West as oppressed in the solitude of domesticity and hidden under the long black *chador* is a crude over-simplification of what has been developing in Iran. Despite heavy pressure, Iranian women are active in social, scientific, and cultural fields, perhaps more now than at any time in their history. For example, half of the positions in the government sector and over 40 per cent of education jobs are filled by women.

Of course, women still are required to observe *hijab*. For some women, however, veiling has facilitated their mobility within male-dominated fields. Thus, many lower-class women who previously remained at home now are mobilised and playing a social role in neighbourhood and religious institutions. Nevertheless, those modern middle-class women who resent forced veiling have not remained passive. Many urban women wear their head scarves very loosely. Officials invariably have complained about "bad-*hijabi*", the laxity of young girls in observing veiling in public, referring to women's resistance against the imposition of *hijab*.

In addition, the opportunity for equal education with men has made a come-back following official restrictive quotas that favoured men. Polygamy has been curtailed, men's unilateral right to divorce has been restricted, and religiously-sanctioned *mut'a* marriage (according to which a formal contract is signed for a specified period of time ranging from a few hours to several years) has been demonised. Child custody, which in Islamic law favours the father (after the child reaches a specified age), is also being debated.

The struggle for women to become judges is now on the agenda. Women's activities are organised in at least 60 civic associations that communicate their ideas through such publications as *Zanan*, *Farzaneh* and *Zan-e Rouz*, organise rallies, participate in international women's meetings, lobby politicians and clerical leaders, and campaign in the Majlis (parliament). Iranian women are themselves at the forefront of the struggle for the empowerment of women in the Muslim world.

Why has this new phase of post-Islamism emerged? It is primarily a result of the shortcomings and contradictions of the Islamist experience in Iran. Some leaders feared that these shortcomings might undermine Islam as the legitimising source of the Islamic republic. To begin with, the post-revolution political structure excluded many groups from participation. Although the *faqih*, or supreme jurist, ruled alongside a democratically elected parliament, restrictions on forming political parties, and the Council of Guardians' disqualification of candidates for electoral office, marginalised various political tendencies. Even some of the system's most ardent supporters were demoralised by the government's excesses in political control and factional infighting. Many former allies (such as Mahdi Bazargan, Sadeq Ghotbzadeh, Bani Sadr, the Mujahedin, Ayatollah Kazem Shariatmadari, Ayatollah Hosain Montazeri, and others) became opponents.

Nor did the Islamic economy deliver as much as was expected. It is true that income distribution has improved compared to the situation before the revolution (in 1977, the top 20 per cent received 57.3 per cent of total income and the lowest 40 per cent received 11.28 per cent; in 1991, the top 20 per cent of the population received about 50 per cent of total income, while the lowest 40 per cent received 13.4 per cent). Nevertheless, the GNP has dropped to half what it was in the late 1970s. Economic blockades, the war with Iraq and a major decline in international oil prices are important factors in this decline, but economic mismanagement and lack of economic security were also significant factors.

With the end of revolutionary exceptionalism and the beginning of normalisation after the Iran-Iraq war, the mundane realities of wages, food, housing, and cars pushed ideology, altruism and the sacred to the sidelines. The social problems of political apathy, youth, marginality, and population growth rates surfaced. Some leaders believed that there was a serious danger of people equating these social ills with Islam. Consequently, they feared that people might turn away from Islam as a whole.

The children of the revolution were undoubtedly the paramount concern. The Islamisation of schools had failed to reproduce an Islamic youth. Recent official studies revealed that bad-*hijabi* among school and university girls is increasing progressively. "We are encountering a serious cultural onslaught. What is to be done?" an official wondered. The official concerns about youth are highlighted in surveys: over 83 per cent of young people spend their leisure time watching TV, but only five per cent of these watch religious programmes; of the 58 per cent who read books, less than six per cent are interested in religious literature.

Young Iranians sense that the future is not very bright for many of them; they do not feel that their education will bring them the expected rewards. The sluggish economy has turned their expectation into outrage. Moral restrictions, in addition, have resulted in frustration.

This is a familiar scenario in Egypt, too, where, in the absence of other credible alternatives, outraged groups turn to Islamic politics. In Iran, however, the question is: which ideological inclinations will these youngsters pursue if they already have experienced Islamism? In the new, post-Islamist phase, young people find themselves in an ideological void, in a situation where they have experienced many ideologies but have gained little. They thus join the ranks of the already demoralised new middle classes and public sector employees. Some youth tend to internalise their condition, turning to nihilism. Many resort to violence. Soccer matches, for example, have become big security headaches for the government because there have been numerous episodes of mass violence and riots, the largest being the Tabriz riots of 1994. The more ambitious youth fantasise about migrating to the West.

It is against this general background that post-Islamism has emerged as a way out, a world view to integrate such alienated and marginalised segments. Beyond alternative thought, secular authenticity — in the form of art, music and modern science — is being offered by some enlightened leaders.

The other factor behind post-Islamism has to do with the paradoxes of the Islamic state. First, the very Islamisation of the state has led to a growing secularisation of *fiqh*, or jurisprudence. The absolute *vilayat-i-faqih* gives power to the supreme jurist to change any law, precept or injunction to fulfil what he deems to be the interest of the state. Even the Constitution and religious *vajibat*, obligations, are not excluded. Because *vilayat*, government in Islam, has precedence over all other obligations. Government is, according to Ayatollah Khomeini, *awjab vajibat* (the highest obligation). This means not only the sacrifice of religious sanctity in the interest of mundane exigencies, but also encroachment on the clergy's prerogative to interpret *shari'a* autonomously.

On the other hand, the *ulama*'s *fatavas*, or verdicts, on public affairs, are subject to approval by the *vali-i-faqih*; and their access to *haq-i iimam*, donations from the faithful, is conditional on the permission of the supreme *faqih*. Finally, the fusion of state and religion has tarnished the spiritual and social legitimacy of the clergy, and many Iranian Muslims tend to equate the failures of the state with that of the *ulama*.

For the first time in its modern history, the Shi'i *ulama* in Iran are losing their independence and power. This development, ironically, has occurred in an Islamic state. Their prerogatives on *fiqh* are being undermined, and their financial independence and legitimacy are being curtailed. This dependency of the *ulama* on the state concerns many of the younger generation, who worry about their future and that of the clergy in general. They feel that they may be better off if they leave politics to the politicians.

It should be borne in mind that the Islamic Revolution in Iran did not emerge from a strong Islamic movement. Islamisation of society in Iran did not come from below, as in Egypt, but was largely inaugurated from above by an Islamic government after the Islamic Revolution. This explains why large segments of the population resisted the institutionalisation of Islamic principles such as veiling, control of leisure and behaviour in the post-Revolution period. Post-Islamism should be viewed in the light of these contradictions and failures, which some religious leaders see as undermining Islam per se. In a sense, post-Islamism seeks to save Islam as faith by dismantling Islamism as politics.

Is there a future for post-Islamism? There is no guarantee that it will prevail. Indeed, it has aroused criticism and opposition, largely from power-holders and the more conservative elements within both the state and society. Soroush and his associates have been attacked by the president, some of the ayatollahs and the foreign minister. The weekly *Payam-e Daneshjou* and vigilante groups of *hizbollah* have assaulted the mayor and Tehran municipality for the spread of music, moral laxity in the public parks and "Western-style urbanisation." In the same way, colourful female outfits, bike-riding, women athletes, skiing, and women's public presence have been the targets of harsh criticism in *Hafteh Name-ye Soobh*, *Jomhuri-ye Islami*, *Farhang-i Afarinesh* and other conservative publications. For example, *Farhang-i Afarinesh* has summed up the "problems" that it claims the women's movement is causing as follows:

"... the growing presence of women in public places, freedom of fashion and colourful outfits, legitimising interaction between men, assertiveness [of women] in public, expressing independent opinions in the household, activity in the male domain, the right to have jobs despite the opposition of family or husband, and education as the first priority under any circumstance — these are some of the ideas that are being fed to the society."

The situation in Iran may remain in a state of flux and uncertainty. Contradictory trends can continue to coexist for a long time. The 1980s bear witness to the resiliency of the Islamic state and its ability to contain such conflicting tendencies. The indications so far, however, are that, despite these lapses, the post-Islamist trend seems well underway. If it is allowed to grow, it is likely to bring significant political changes in the country with vital implications for political Islam in the Muslim world. More immediately, it is bound to pose a challenge to democrats, who will be forced to reconsider the future of democracy in Iran.

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Al-Ahram Weekly

Unforgivable insult

A picture may well be worth more than a thousand words if tension continues to mount as a result of the heinous poster depicting the Prophet Mohamed in the form of a pig. Rioting, as was to be expected, has erupted in Hebron. And Israeli officials, along with some religious leaders, have taken pains to point out that the image portrayed in the posters distributed by the young Jewish extremist, Tatiana Susskind, do not reflect Israel's image of Islam.

But if Netanyahu and other leading Israeli officials, both in the past and the present, have balked hurling insults at Islam, they have been quite willing to treat the Arabs and Palestinians as animals that must be domesticated. Ignoring the various massacres and slaughters such as the one which took place in Qena last year, Israel's perception of the way the peace process must proceed clearly indicates that little consideration has been made for the rights of the Palestinians. If proof is needed of this, one only has to ask why the process has been stalled for months.

If the Arabs and the Palestinians have adamantly insisted that Israel abide by the Oslo Accords, and that the settlement construction in Abu Ghneim be halted, it is only because not doing so would lead to two equally dire outcomes. First, by continuing the settlements prior to the conclusion of the negotiations, Israel is prejudging their outcome. Second, more settlements mean more settlers — perhaps those who would be sympathetic to efforts such as those exerted by Susskind. Again, there is ample evidence to indicate that extremist Jewish settlers are more than capable of blasphemy, insulting Muslims or murdering school children, to name but a few.

The stupidity of this poster incident aside, what truly shocks the conscience is that many of Israel's Jews are sure to remind any and all of the horrors of the Holocaust, but are equally likely to conveniently forget these atrocities when they are busy killing Arabs.

Hanging in the balance

The US Congress's support for Israel is not the voters' choice, writes James Zogby

Results of a new poll demonstrate that US public opinion continues to move toward greater equilibrium in its understanding of Middle East issues.

In three distinct areas of investigation — including evaluations of: US allies in the Middle East, the Middle East peace process, and the US Middle East foreign aid programme — US voters display almost total balance in their attitudes.

A June 1997 poll was conducted for the Arab-American Institute. With 1,012 registered voters polled, the results have a high degree of accuracy (+/- 3.2 per cent).

The most striking results of the AAI poll emerged when US voters were asked to rate the importance for the United States of four Middle East countries. Saudi Arabia beat Israel, Egypt and Jordan.

A large proportion (36.5 per cent) assessed Saudi Arabia as a "very valuable ally" and about 40 per cent thought Saudi Arabia was "somewhat valuable". The total, over 76 per cent, was higher than Israel's combined total of 74.5 per cent. Thirty-five per cent thought Israel was "very valuable" and 39.5 per cent thought it was "somewhat valuable".

While the Saudi edge over Israel is a slight 1.5 per cent, it nevertheless represents an important breakthrough for the kingdom. During the '70s and '80s, Israel's ratings were more than twice those of Saudi Arabia. Even after the Gulf War, Israel's ratings still edged out all Arab countries, including Saudi Arabia.

The fact that US voters continue to appreciate the US-Saudi relationship, despite persistent negative press, is significant.

The other Arab countries included in this poll, Egypt and Jordan, were also rated as valuable US allies. Egypt's combined score was 65.6 per cent and Jordan's rating was 59.6 per cent.

Voters showed equal degrees of support for and opposition to US foreign aid to Israel, Egypt and the Palestinian National Authority.

About 21 per cent — exactly the same proportion that supports the US programme for Israel — believe that US aid to the Palestinian National Authority is either "just the right amount" or "should be increased". On the other hand, 63 per cent of those polled feel that the Palestinian aid programme is too high, while 64 per cent feel Israel receives too much aid.

US aid to Egypt, on the other hand, is supported by only 18 per cent, while 66 per cent feel that the amount is too high.

This near balance in support of and opposition to aid to all three countries is noteworthy in light of recent Congressional votes to punish the Palestinians and Egypt. The attacks on both were quite intense, as were threats to extract vengeance by cutting their US support levels.

By focusing only on Egypt and the Palestinian National Authority and refraining from criticising the high level of US aid to Israel, therefore, Congress is clearly out of touch with public opinion.

In general, the US public is opposed to all foreign aid. The untouchable nature of Israel's aid programme is a function of Congressional politics, not a reflection of public support.

Continuing the trend that was first observed in a similar April 1997 poll, American voters held both Palestinians and Israelis to blame for the impasse in the peace process. Thirteen per cent blame Israel; 19 per cent blame the Palestinians, but 42 per cent said both parties are equally to blame.

When asked whom the US administration should pressure "to get the peace process moving again", four per cent said Israel, four per cent said the Palestinians, and 44.5 per cent said both should be pressured equally. This is further evidence that US voters are displaying a new sense of balance.

What makes these results important is not only the fact that they reflect a continued movement of US opinion in the direction of even-handedness, but that this trend toward balance is occurring in the face of an all-out assault on the Palestinian Authority and Egypt by supporters of Israel, not to mention continuing press coverage of the bombing of US troops in Saudi Arabia. None of these efforts, furthermore, have been directly countered by a pro-Arab public opinion campaign. While the behaviour of the Netanyahu government has certainly contributed to the change in US attitudes, recent public statements of balanced concern made by President Clinton have also played a role in helping to bring about this shift in public opinion.

This shift occurs as the Clinton administration weighs policy options in an effort to salvage a floundering Middle East peace process. While the administration is coming under some domestic criticism for its apparent passivity, there are indications that the president and his advisors are deeply concerned about the collapse of the process and the dangers that this collapse poses to US allies and interests in the broader region.

Recent public comments by the president and comments by some White House and State Department officials make it clear that the president is actively engaged in discussing options to deal with the crisis.

Weighing heavily on the administration is the realisation that vital US interests are at stake should the crisis in the Middle East continue. There is also grave concern that, should the effort collapse, there will be a loss of confidence in the possibility of achieving a negotiated settlement. Should this occur, the US will have squandered significant political assets, and will face possible threats to its future standing in the region.

In this context, recent warnings by Crown Prince Abdullah have served as an important reminder that concerns over the fate of the peace process are shared by an important US ally.

Also weighing heavily on the administration, of course, is the highly unstable internal political situation in Israel and the reaction that any dramatic US initiative will generate from pro-Israel forces in the US and in Congress.

Shifts in US opinion should, therefore, tell Washington that American voters will support a balanced and firm approach to peace and will welcome an evenhanded US plan to restore momentum and confidence in the peace process.

The ability of hard-line anti-peace advocates to influence US public attitudes is limited. A strong display of leadership will receive strong public support.

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Mixed signals

An American-Israeli think-tank accuses Egyptian diplomacy of being "very unhelpful". Mohamed Sid-Ahmed questions what stands behind the anti-Egyptian campaign

The idea is not to defend the step-by-step approach blindly, nor to oppose any other approach towards the peace process as a matter of principle. But what is worthy of attention at this juncture is that Netanyahu's proposal to abandon the step-by-step approach and replace it by a package deal that carries all the characteristics of a final ultimatum addressed to the Arab protagonists is encouraged by influential American quarters, including prestigious think-tanks like the New York-based Council on Foreign Relations. Far from reactivating the moribund peace process, this development is likely to drive the last nail in its coffin.

It should be remembered that Egypt has always constituted one of the two basic pillars of the peace process since its inception, and that, like it or not, the relationship between Egypt and Israel is the cornerstone on which the entire process rests and the barometer which indicates whether it is moving forward towards peace or whether the region is sinking once again into a state of renewed hostilities.

Some of the ideas now being floated for the resumption of negotiations proceed from the assumption that Egypt is responsible for the breakdown in the peace process and that, accordingly, it should be shunted aside. Significant in this respect is a document recently issued by the Institute for Advanced Strategic and Political Studies (IASPS), an American-Israeli think-tank with offices in Jerusalem and Washington. The author of the document, who obviously prefers to remain anonymous, writes under the pen name, Paul Remington, and is described as "a policy analyst in Middle East matters in Washington". The document, entitled 'Egypt's (Very Unhelpful) Foreign Policy', urges the Clinton administration to reassess the respective roles of the various actors in the Middle East negotiation process, or else stand accused of "incompetence" and "self-contradictory policies."

The main thrust of the document is directed against Egyptian diplomacy, specifically, against the person of Foreign Minister Amr Moussa, who is pejoratively described as a "hard-line neo-Nasserist... anti-Western ideologue who yearns for the days of the Soviet Union" and for whom "the future belongs to Cairo or to Jerusalem, but not to both." In contrast, former Jordanian Prime Minister, Abdel-Rahman Kabariti, is described as a man who "understands that traditional ideas of 'Arab solidarity' and 'pan-Arabism' have less relevance than ever before" and supports "Jordan's ever-strengthening relationship with Israel". According to the document, Egypt is now closer to opponents of Washington and Tel Aviv and their allies (notably the Turkish military), than it is to its "patron", the United States, thus proving itself unworthy to maintain its status as America's principal Arab partner in the peace process — and the largest Arab recipient of US aid.

The document accuses Egyptian diplomacy of adopting a systematically hostile policy towards Jordan. For example, according to the document, in 1995 Egypt foiled a plan by King Hussein to overthrow Saddam Hussein. It is also accused of having opposed a Jordanian proposal to transform Iraq into a federal state made up of three cantons, Kurdish, Sunnite and Shi'ite, under the pretext that the federal option, at the expense of Iraq's territorial integrity, would weaken Arab solidarity and undermine pan-Arabism. Not content with campaigning against King Hussein's Iraqi initiative, as the document puts it, Cairo also attempted to interfere in the Jordanian monarch's attempts to reconcile with the Saudis after the end of the Gulf War, and strongly opposed the Turkish-Israeli military alliance which, according to the document, made Jordan feel that it was time to sign a peace agreement with Israel and to join the "enlightened" states of the region which had moved away from making ethnicity and pan-nationalism the basis for inter-state cooperation and solidarity.

Egyptian diplomacy is even accused of having tried to sabotage the Jordanian-Israeli peace treaty itself, by publicly admonishing King Hussein for "rushing" to normalise relations with Israel before ensuring the return of occupied Arab territories. And, at the time of the Hebron negotiations, Cairo supposedly prodded Arafat to adopt a hard line, instead of encouraging flexibility. The document attributes other anti-American and anti-Israeli initiatives to Egypt, including: pressurising Arab Gulf states to distance themselves from Israel, obstructing US efforts in the Security Council to ensure that the oil-for-food resolution would strictly monitor Baghdad's income from oil sales, and shifting the emphasis of the 1996 Sharm El-Sheikh summit away from terrorism to the peace process for fear that a discussion of terrorism would, in the words of the document, "place too much blame on the Palestinians".

The worrying thing about the document is that it represents the views not only of an apparently marginal Jewish-American organisation, but also of an influential sector of the American decision-making establishment, including the US Congress. One should not underestimate the significance of the recent decision by a congressional subcommittee to cut off aid to Egypt, even if other American institutions have challenged the decision and questioned its wisdom. For it was clearly motivated less by economic considerations than by the desire to convey American displeasure with Egypt. The political symbolism is clear: when Israel continues to receive its full quota of foreign aid appropriations while Egypt's entire quota is simply dropped, this symbolises that the peace process no longer rests on two pillars but on only one. Moreover, Washington's recent decision to channel part of Egypt's share in American foreign aid to Jordan, albeit only a small part, carries the symbolic meaning that Jordan's role in future negotiations will be promoted while Egypt's is to be demoted.

So far, however, President Clinton has not formally espoused the recommendations of the IASPS document. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright recently admitted that Egypt remains the most active party in trying to salvage the peace process. At the Denver Summit, Clinton endorsed the summiteers' statement on the Middle East, which supported the Oslo process, the Madrid framework and the land-for-peace tradeoff. Still, there are enough mixed signals coming from Washington to justify Egyptian diplomacy seeking clarification from the Clinton administration as to where exactly it stands vis-à-vis two antipodal lines: the line Washington still officially upholds, and the anti-Egyptian line advocated by pro-Israeli quarters in the United States, which now include part of the American decision-making establishment itself.

Rolling back the tide

By Naguib Mahfouz

In the past year, terrorist attacks have diminished by 50 per cent, for three reasons. First, security precautions have been stepped up and improved. This is a very good thing, as we have to deal with a criminal element, and I believe we are going about it in the right way.

Friends who have visited Upper Egypt say that security precautions are very visible everywhere, and this is a strong deterrent. Also, in the event of an act of terrorism, the necessary steps can be taken rapidly.

I am also convinced that official interest in the development of Upper Egypt has been responsible for the improved situation, as one of the causes of extremism is economic depression. The development projects in the south will take several years to mature, but they are already giving hope to the new generations who look forward to realising their ambitions. Closing the door of freedom in their faces led to their rejection of society and their adoption of extremism and terrorism.

The third reason is people's awareness of the situation in Algeria and Iran. The bloody shambles of Algeria gives us an idea of what can happen if we allow ourselves to follow blind fanaticism. As for Iran, after years of sinking ever deeper into religious extremism, it has been obliged to follow a more moderate line, as demonstrated by the results of the last elections.

Based on an interview by Mohamed Salmawy.

The Press This Week

The Hong Kong lesson

Al-Ahali: "From the very beginning, our position was, and still is, one of clear and definite opposition to US aid and the Camp David Accords of 1978, on which this aid is based. We are also opposed to the so-called 'economic reform' policies and have called for an alternative policy based on self-reliance. This is our position. Suffice it to say that US aid has always been linked to peace with Israel — even US officials admit that — and has been used as an instrument of pressure on Egyptian decision-makers... The US is getting more from aid than it gives."
(Lutfi Waked, 25 June)

Al-Wafd: "Our distinguished Nasserist colleague Hamdin Sabbahi has every right to express his opinion on the law regulating the relationship between the owners and the tenants of agricultural land, to challenge the government over this law and to warn against what might happen if it is enforced. Likewise, the government and the media are entitled to defend the law and to dispel any misgivings about it. But what the government is not entitled to is to arrest Sabbahi, torture him and hurt him physically and psychologically, just because of his political opinions. I believe the crisis will blow over and that the revolt some people predict will not happen, but the torture of Sabbahi will remain a dark spot in the government's record."
(Magdi Mehanna, 27 June)

Al-Shaab: "The official and public reaction to the Congress decision to regard Jerusalem as the capital of Israel is regrettably inadequate. One wonders why Arab ambassadors to Washington were not withdrawn for consultations with their home governments. This would undoubtedly have helped the US administration in its battle with Congress. Why has the Arab League not convened at the level of foreign ministers to look into this grave matter. Why have non-governmental groups not presented any petitions to US embassies? Why have our officials not canceled their trips to the US, as Netanyahu did? Why have these officials not refused to meet US delegations? And why have Arab airports not turned away US planes, even for a single day? To sum it up, why was there no reaction?"
(Talaat Romeih, 27 June)

Al-Gomhuria: "At the time when Great Britain honours the commitments it made in 1984 and prepares to hand over Hong Kong to the Chinese, Netanyahu, whose country is 'a minor product' of the old Colonial British Empire, refuses to honour standing agreements. Netanyahu is trying to revive the concepts and methods of of colonialism.' He is destroying the homes of the Palestinians and building settlements to bring in Jewish settlers, the latest breed of mercenaries."
(Mahfouz El-Ansari, 28 June)

Akhbar El-Yom: "The problem is no longer that the United States is biased towards Israel. It is that US envoys, such as Dennis Ross have shown themselves to be keener Zionists than Netanyahu. This is also true of some US congressmen and administration officials. This is hardly surprising. Israel is part of the US strategy aiming to dominate the region. Any hope for an even-handed US role in the peace process is mere delusion. The United States would turn a blind eye to Israel's nuclear arsenal but raise a furore because Syria has acquired a few missiles or because Egypt has conducted military drills. The US threat to cut off aid to Egypt is a good example of the US role, so are the accusations leveled against Egypt in the Congressional subcommittee."
(Galal Aref, 28 June)

Al-Ahram: "The return of Hong Kong, after 156 years of British rule, to China is a reminder that no matter how long an occupation endures, it must end. Britain knows it is losing the goose that lays the golden eggs and that the handover will boost the power of the Chinese giant and affect Western interests in the colony. But it had to admit that occupation must end."
(Ibrahim Nafie, 30 June)

Compiled by **Hala Saqr**



The focus of Newt Gingrich's face is his nose, which I drew with Mickey Mouse in mind. Locks of hair lie obediently across his forehead, which is compressed, as if by the strain of deep thought. Each wrinkle of his brow seems independently devoted to a new idea, yet all these lines converge upon his eyes. His gaze is quite intense, and pulls all his features up into the centre of his face. I drew Gingrich's cheeks, on the other hand, as extensions of his fleshy neck, straining upward and outward.



Close up

Salama A. Salama

Younger and wiser

Young people everywhere represent change and renewal. New trends in government and leadership, a change of mood and an innovative society are all in the hands of the young.

It was always said that European society tended to be conservative, whilst America, as a younger, more daring and adventurous society, was less concerned with tradition and old patterns of thought and behaviour. This was the reason given for Clinton's victory over George Bush in spite of the younger man's lack of experience in foreign policy, his naiveté in domestic policy, and his embarrassing record of extramarital adventures.

It was therefore a tremendous shock that the tide of global change stemmed from a new generation taking power in Britain, of all places: Britain, that bastion of conservative political tradition. John Major was defeated by Tony Blair, leader of the Labour Party, who is barely 46 years old, at the helm of a new generation of political leaders. Following this election, there came an even greater shock when the Tories elected a new leader, William Hague, who is only 36.

This renewal in world politics, however, has spread beyond America and Europe, reaching such countries as Iran, where a relatively young generation played an important role in the last elections, sweeping Khatami to the presidency in spite of the staunch opposition of the traditional, conservative clergy and the commercial lower middle classes.

The entry of a younger generation into politics is not restricted to leadership alone, but is spreading throughout Congress in the US, the House of Commons in England, and various political parties everywhere. Culture is also being transformed thanks to the efforts and innovations of the young. In the age of the Web, the culture of growth is urgently required — not only in finance and business, but also in art, music and theatre.

If we compare these developments with the situation in Egypt, on the other hand, we find that in political parties or the government, amongst cabinet ministers, or those in charge of organisations and companies, increasing numbers of those in positions of responsibility are in their sixties. The whippersnappers are rarely younger than 50. These gerontocratic tendencies are signs of a failure which reflects the fact that the abyss between us and the world is growing wider every day. Those debating the problems and prospects of young Egyptians and Arabs should bear this in mind.



Soapbox

The Hebron detonator

Since work began on the Abu Ghneim settlement, bloodshed has been commonplace in Hebron. More than 150 Palestinian teenagers have been injured in confrontations with Israeli forces.

Recently, posters were put up outside shops in the old marketplace in the heart of the city. The posters insult the Prophet Mohamed and feature a pig reading a book labelled "The Qur'an". They are calculated to be as insulting as possible to all Muslims, believers or not, but they are also deeply offending to anyone who respects religion.

The posters only reflect the racism of the Israeli military and the Jewish settlers. Authorities declared that they had arrested a settler from nearby Jerusalem, said to have distributed the posters. But she could not have acted alone. There is ample reason to believe that the Israeli soldiers helped her.

The mayor of Hebron, therefore, must demand that Jewish settlers be expelled from Hebron, and that the remaining Israeli troops withdraw from the city. As long as the settlers and their protectors remain, racist aggressions of this kind will continue.

Palestinians throughout Palestine are calling for a general strike. Netanyahu has apologised to the Palestinians in a bid to appease public outrage. But this apology will do little to prevent an explosion from occurring sooner or later if settlers remain in the city.

Hebron is set up as a detonator, which will set off the mines planted throughout occupied Palestine.



Mahgoub Omar

This week's Soupbox speaker is an expert on Palestinian affairs and a columnist with Al-Shaab *newspaper.*

The criminals on the fence

Neutrality in international affairs has become a dirty word, writes **Gamil Matar**. In the battle against the new global enemies, there is room only for partisans of good — or evil

No one in the West seems prepared to stand by Switzerland in its current predicament. Swiss people are now liars and racketeers. Their prosperity, at least according to the latest campaign against that country, is due entirely to the money deposited in Switzerland by Jews before they were put to death in Nazi concentration camps, or by the Nazis who stole the money from their Jewish victims. Now, Switzerland's traditionally lauded neutrality has become a devious policy that must be condemned and put to an end.

The Swiss people, their government, banks, history and reputation are not in an enviable position. Yet few in the international media have come forward to defend them or to alleviate their distress. No one has suggested that Switzerland be tried according to international law. Indeed, no one has protested the sentence passed against the Swiss government, stipulating the amount of compensations it has to pay, or even thought of investigating the accusations.

That the Western media should adopt this stance is understandable. After all, the issue concerns Jewish interests, and any issue that involves Jewish interests is automatically placed in a special category. Different rules apply: the customary principles of freedom of expression and opinion so ardently embraced by the West are no longer valid.

It is difficult to determine whether Switzerland's current predicament is directly related to Jewish bank deposits, estimated by the Swiss at $70 million and by some Jewish groups at $7 billion. Switzerland's rapid fall from grace could be the result of international economic factors, such as the realisation that the Swiss banking system poses an obstacle to economic globalisation. Important geo-strategic factors could also be involved, namely the need to put an end to the Switzerland's longstanding political neutrality now that most of Europe has been absorbed into two complementary frameworks: the European Union and NATO.

Switzerland invented the policy of neutrality when Europe was a continent of dense forests peopled by barbaric tribes embroiled in constant warfare and destruction. Their belligerence did not cease with the establishment of the nation state, particularly in the recent phases of its development. Switzerland, therefore, continued to practice neutrality and sought the support of the European commercial powers to this end. Then, when Europe became divided into two camps, communist and capitalist clients alike found that they could benefit from Swiss neutrality. They therefore maintained it and, albeit for difference reasons, encouraged Austria's neutrality as well.

Following the collapse of the USSR, however, Europe found itself in a vacuum, bereft of competing mutually exclusive systems of belief and unable to establish an internal balance of power. In other words, there was no longer any justification for Swiss neutrality, at least according to some Western analysts.

The matter, however, is more complex. The policy initiated by Eisenhower and Dulles has come full circle. In the '50s, the US was strongly opposed to the principle of positive neutrality. Dulles was the first US statesman to use the epithets of "evil" and "evil-doers" to describe the policies and leaders of America's adversaries. According to the logic of the US administration at the time, there could be no neutrality between good (i.e. the West) and evil (the Soviet Union and communism). To opt for neutrality was in effect to side with evil, which merited the same punitive measures.

The same logic has surfaced again in American political rhetoric. Of course, the West still represents all that is good and right. It is the cast of evil-doers that has changed. These are no longer communism, the Warsaw pact and the Soviet Union. There are other players, who may appear secondary on the surface, but who are vital in order to affirm the existence of enemies. Terrorism, organised crime, drugs, environmental pollution and weapons of mass destruction have stepped in to fill the role. One cannot remain neutral toward these calamities. The lines between good and evil are clearly drawn; there can be no justification for sitting on the fence. One can hardly argue against what appears to be, at least in form, the theoretical basis for the American orientation in building the new world order. After all, how can one reasonably remain neutral in the face of organised crime, terrorism, drug smuggling, environmental pollution or biological weapons?

If it is impossible to remain neutral, then it follows that any country that seeks to do so should be condemned as a state that condones and abets the perpetuation of these five enemies, thus earning international ostracism. It is equally possible, however, for the superpower that invented this theory to expand or contract the definition of what constitutes the enemy whenever it finds it expedient to do so. Terrorism, in the context of a particular issue, could come to mean conversion to Islam. Indeed, this equation has gradually permeated popular Western thought. Terrorism might also be equated with throwing stones at tanks and armored vehicles in occupied Palestine, if we are to believe some prominent American political commentators. To build a petrochemicals factory in any non-Western state or to uproot a tree in Africa is to perpetuate the horror of environmental pollution. On the other hand, if large wood manufacturing companies raze entire forests in Canada, northern Europe, the Amazon, or Malaysia, if Western factories consume thousands of tons of coal and pollute global water resources with nuclear and chemical waste, and if the largest country in the world refuses to abide by its commitment to reduce the levels of carbon dioxide emitted by its factories, that is another matter altogether.

If the international community knows where it should stand with regard to the five enemies mentioned above, it is also beginning to learn how it should stand with regard to what has become the new world order's sixth enemy. Anti-Semitism, too, has become an issue toward which there can be no neutrality. Again, the definition has acquired a useful flexibility. The concept of anti-Semitism has come to extend beyond the manifestations of anti-Jewish hostilities in Europe in the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century. It has come to comprise a lengthy list of taboos such as criticising Jewish leaders for exaggerating the extent of the suffering of the Jewish people, questioning the absolute validity of Hebrew myths which date back centuries before the birth of Christ, commenting on the influence of the Jewish lobby in the US on American domestic and foreign policy, and remarking on the prevalence of Jewish influence in universities and research centres, the media, publishing, and the entertainment industry. Other taboos include criticising Israeli policy, opposing Israeli settlements, and protesting Israel's regional monopoly on nuclear power and other weapons of mass destruction. All of these taboos have entered the list of "evils" that threaten international peace and stability and the process of building the new world order. Here too, no nation can take a neutral stance, or what the Arabs might term an objective position, with regard to the Arab-Israeli struggle. Perhaps in this light we can understand the concerns in Russia and the EU — two important cornerstones of the new world order — regarding accusations of neutrality and objectivity which will surely be made if they seek to influence Israel or seek a more impartial role as mediators in the peace process. Clearly, the the principle of neutrality in international law, and the exercise of neutrality in international politics, are drawing their last gasp.

The writer is director of the Arab Centre for Development and Futuristic Research.

The back-benchers' turn

By Fathi Abdel-Fattah

The "call for peace in the Middle East" issued in Amsterdam by European Union leaders marks a radical break with previous conceptions of Europe's role in the settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict. It was not just a declaration of a stance which differs substantially from that of the United States, but also a proposal offering an objective and opportune substitute for the American role. It is an unprecedented accomplishment in that connection.

The statement was issued at a time when it has become clear that the US, as the sponsor of the regional peace process, is incapable of extricating that process from the dilemma in which it is now floundering as a direct result of the arrogant and extremist policies of the reactionary Likud authority under Binyamin Netanyahu's leadership.

The European statement condemned settlement construction, the land annexation policies, and the changes to the topography of the occupied territories. It recognised the Palestinians' right to self-determination, including the establishment of an independent state. This contrasts sharply with the US policy of unconditional support for Israeli violence and hostility. The US has torpedoed two UN Security Council resolutions condemning Israeli aggression against occupied Jerusalem, and its relentless settlement expansion policy. The US then proceeded to reinforce Israel's hostile practices by endorsing the resolution issued by Congress to consider unified Jerusalem as the eternal capital of Israel, and to transfer the US Embassy there from Tel Aviv.

Following the 1990 Madrid conference, both the US and Israel insisted that EU states should remain mere observers, not partners in or co-sponsors of the peace process. Since then, European countries have attempted, individually and collectively, to shape events in the Middle East, but always indirectly. Still, the EU has been the most generous donor of aid for the building up of the infrastructure and the establishment of economic projects in the territory controlled by the Palestinian National Authority.

A project has also been undertaken by the EU to enhance cooperation with the Middle Eastern countries. Its main outlines were discussed in Barcelona last year.

Clearly, the post-Maastricht transition of the European states from the common market phase to the European Union, in the absence of the threat traditionally posed by the eastern bloc, and the breakdown of the Warsaw Pact, have all placed Europe in a position which allows it to undertake a more influential role in global conflict management, especially as far as the Middle East is concerned.

At any rate, the EU proposal is far more objective than any US suggestions, and it is designed to enhance the credibility of the peace process. It implicitly denounces the bias inherent in US policy, and as such challenges the US's supremacy in the sponsorship of the settlement. In other words, the Middle East will most probably be the region in which an independent European role will be exercised.

From an Arab perspective, the European stance provides an opportunity for at least some of the regimes of this region to review their positions, which still based on the assumption that the Americans continue to control more than 90 per cent of the "war and peace game" in the Middle East.

The expiry date of this expression, coined by the late President Sadat at the end of the seventies, under very different circumstances, has arrived. Many changes have occurred since Camp David. These must be taken into consideration. The most important of these new manifestations has been the evolution of the European role in the Middle East, and its transition from the status of an observer to that of an active player.

The writer is a social scientist and a senior journalist with Al-Gomhuria *newspaper.*

Reflections By Hani Shukrallah — Closing credits

As Israel prepares for war, the Arabs continue to score one resounding triumph after another — against Arab women. The latest battle in this ignominious 30-year war was aptly led by a clown posing as a general. The feast of fools is in full swing, and the general, his battleground a drab and dreary Cairo courthouse and his sword a pair of scissors, has issued a resounding battle cry; he is determined to chop off the last clitoris in Egypt.

Israeli generals and soldiers, on the other hand, do not discriminate on the basis of age or gender: as always, men, women and children are to be killed, maimed and mutilated. Is it a coincidence that the last two decades, which have witnessed the greatest triumphs of Arab men against Arab women, are equally the decades of relentless progress for the "peace process"?

But, as I have argued before, the peace process has come to its natural end. Having completed its 20-year-long life cycle, the worm has turned. We should have expected it, but we did not: ultimately, the chrysalis revealed not the 'butterfly' of Palestinian self-determination, independent statehood and national liberation, but the creature of our worst nightmares. Allon-plus stares us in the face, and the final settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict turns out to be the final solution for the "Palestinian question".

As befits a final solution, much more blood will need to be shed before it can be put into effect. The problem — involving both the essence and the unique character of the current crisis in the "peace process" — is that, despite its tremendous successes, neither the Arabs nor the Palestinians are sufficiently broken to acquiesce to the monster that was inherent in the process from the start. This is the crux of the dilemma that the Palestinian leadership and Arab governments find themselves facing at the moment. They have too much at stake in the process to declare it dead, but are unable to concede its inevitable results — however much some of them, at least, may wish to do so. So for the moment, it is only possible to go through the motions — half-hearted attempts at resuscitation; maintaining a semblance of negotiations; suggesting face-saving formulas to try and give the process even a temporary reprieve and, meanwhile, exert a number of measured, strictly controlled and highly restrained efforts at pressure.

But how long can this go on? A return to a no peace-no war situation is impossible. Stalled negotiations and temper tantrums aside, the Palestinian leadership is up to its neck in dealings with the Israelis, dependent on their goodwill even for the movement of its top officials, held strictly accountable for "Israeli security", its economy in a shambles and its human rights record uglier by the moment — not to speak of even less ignoble Israeli-Palestinian interactions. It may be conceivable, in theory, that Arafat packs up, collects his "Tunisians", and leaves, but very difficult indeed to imagine. The logic of the peace process brought the once "revolutionary" Palestinian leadership to Gaza. The logic at the end of that process is that it is too late to go back.

Moreover, two Arab states, namely Egypt and Jordan, are already manacled to Israel with iron-clad peace treaties, while several others have various on-going "exchanges" with that state, notwithstanding last year's Cairo summit resolution advocating a "freeze" on Arab-Israeli ties, with the exception of Egypt and Jordan. While Egypt is clearly unhappy with the situation, its room for manoeuvre is limited, not only by the US-guaranteed stipulations of the peace treaty but also, and perhaps more significantly, by Washington's ability to exact punishments and withhold rewards, at a time when the Egyptian government is banking heavily on foreign-investment-driven economic growth.

Jordan's muttered protests at Netanyahu's policies have yet to sour the intense honeymoon that the Jordanian monarchy has been publicly enjoying with Israel since Oslo provided the long-anticipated green light. They are unlikely to do so. Jordanian-Israeli ties, which go way back, are out of the closet and are not about to be stuffed back in. Yet Jordanian-Israeli ties cannot withstand the intense pressures generated by this non-consummation of the peace process vows. Already, these pressures are making themselves felt as the king tries to clamp down on an increasingly vociferous and widespread opposition to his regime's relations with Israel.

Even Syria's phenomenal success, over the past 20 years, in evading both a confrontation with Israel, and the vortex of the peace process, will most likely be put to increasingly severe tests as we stand, petrified, at the threshold of "the final settlement". Syria's strongest bargaining card, Lebanon, is also its Achilles' heel, the ideal site for the full exercise of Israeli "wrath".

It is a situation that seems to be crying out for some sort of action. And I believe that Israel is already preparing for just such action.

Matters could not be more propitious. A racist thug is at the helm in Israel; the butcher of Sabra and Shatila is the most powerful man in the Israeli government, and the most sharp-taloned of Labour hawks is the leader of the Israeli opposition. Most fascinating of all, Zionist zealotry appears more and more to have become the ruling ideology in the US: Al Gore sings elegies in praise of Zionism and Israel to hysterical applause in AIPAC; Netanyahu flaunts declared American policy to standing ovations from the two houses of Congress; the US vetoes a round of resolutions at the UN; Albright suddenly discovers her Jewish origins; Gingrich and co. grow increasingly virulent; Martin Indyk, AIPAC's, and hence Israel's, Man in the State Department, sees his star rise to dizzying heights; and the US is gripped by a frenzy of anti-Arab, anti-Muslim racism, fostered daily by Hollywood, network television and the bulk of the American media. An affinity with Israel and ideological Zionism seems especially suited to US policy needs in a globalising, post-Cold War world, and not just in the Middle East.

Could the filthy posters allegedly put up by one (only one!) of Hebron's 400-plus hooligans be the first shot in Israel's coming war? The act cries out for the next suicide bombing, almost commands it, and I find it very difficult to believe that the 1,500-strong Israeli armed forces in Hebron, which, in a little over a week, have shot and injured some 150 Palestinians, were unable to prevent a single deranged woman from putting up a deranged drawing all over town.

Israel is preparing for war. It wants a religious war, a final endorsement of the racist and exclusivist nature of the Zionist state, to mark its 50th anniversary.







Three for the road



David Blake finds time for dancing

Post-graduate students of the Conservatoire perform selections from *Madame Butterfly*

Graduates' concert; Conservatoire students; Sayed Darwish Hall; 26 June

High summertime is coming. It is getting late for music. The great calm will soon descend with no music to fill empty sails, but there have been interesting breezes. So, still time for dancing even if you have to do it alone.

Cairo is capricious. When the city's emanation softly breathes that there is "nothing around tonight" something pops up. There is activity again and we are listening our time away. One such high listening point was Boris Perrenoud conducting his concert with Medhat Abdel-Salam and the Cairo Symphony earlier this month. Now, as June passes, we have had three other interesting events. The first was on 26 June at the Sayed Darwish Hall, Cairo Conservatoire of Music. The event: a performance of short scenes from various operas which gave the performers their graduation degrees. But we were not handed out programmes listing the names of the performers or operas.

So this is a scene of authority for the Cairo music world. Few students about. The place looks deceptively peaceful and greenish. No signs of the internecine battles which have supposedly taken place here over the decades. Inside the theatre is pleasant with various professors — Nabila Erian, Violette Makkar, Nevine Allouba — moving around offering last minute advice to their pupils before the performance. A piano accompanies them — no orchestra, but the whole thing is conducted by Ivan Filev.

The performance begins with Puccini's *Madame Butterfly*, the arrival of the heroine and her sailor husband to the villa where she will have erased her life, race and dignity for love. No grand manner here. The student being examined is Dalia Farouk. She is 20 years old and looks younger — tall enough, slim and lovely. Her voice is quite rich, but easy and colourful with an opulent expansive top. The high D, the climax of her arrival, was managed easily. She tried no histrionics; tone and delivery were what counted. Then came the love scene, the orchestra much missed, but Farouk's tone was equal to this long outpouring and was quite heroic. In her performance there was no coyness, none of that poor little thing victim of the cruel West. In a few years she could try the part — which is no way a light lyric role, but fully dramatic —in the opera.

Carmen, with Hala Chamourie, mezzo, as the gypsy and Alfi Milad as Don Jose followed. Through the rest of the excerpts, as well as Sobhi Badie who sang lieutenant to Farouk's Butterfly, was Reda El-Wakil and other singers from the Opera Company helping the young conservatoire graduates to feel something of what it is like to survive the strange ritual display of opera singing and come through victorious. Chamourie, as Carmen, did well through sections of Act 1 and 2. Though she was quite outside the character, her voice was richly mezzo, her French excellent and the gypsy song was terrific as a concert piece, up to time and lovely to listen to. Milad has a strong, beautifully operatic voice, but the top notes take on a raw quality that should be watched or it will leave the singer hoarse and empty. His tone and his acting were sympathetic and caring. He looks another contender for the Opera House Main Hall.

As the occasion continued, and slice after slice of opera was delivered, all sung very well, phrase by phrase, it became clear that not much trouble had been taken about the dramatic presentation of the characters Verdi and the other composers had done their best to create: people living, suffering, making sounds, it is odd for many to comprehend, but it is opera. That is what opera is about, acting and presentation. With opera, the acting is just as important as singing. Opera worldwide these days belongs to producers. They wield the power once held by the musical maestri. Stand and deliver is quite out.

The Higher Study student players did *Traviata*, acts 2 and 4, with Inji Mohsen as Violetta and Tamer Tewfik as Alfredo. The baritone was Hossam Mustafa. This baritone, as Alfredo's father, was excellent and Inji Mohsen looked good. There was no letter reading by Violetta from this fourth act, but her aria *Addio del passato* was tragic and powerful. She had deportment and her slices of the *Traviata* cake went smoothly enough, but Violetta, the girl from the wrong side of the tracks, making it into the corrupted drawing rooms of the barons and their children like her lover, was never there. But they all sang well. Tamer Tewfik, like Dalia Farouk, colours his tones with feeling.

The *Ballo in Maschera* of Verdi had Jihane Abu Bakr as Amelia, Alfi Milad as the king, and Hassan Mustafa as Renato. This opera is at present being done in the Main Hall. A regular pillar of the repertoire, it is the happiest thing the Opera House has. All these young singers can transfer their student efforts to big theatre having first had the experience the small Sayed Darwish Hall offers.

The results of the student singers would have been of great interest, but what mattered was that these young people are there on the stage doing good work, on a par with conservatoire students anywhere else in the world. What is lacking is production advice. Still, these young singers showed no shrieking, no flattening or false notes throughout the entire evening. And they had musical understanding. It was civilised to see them doing their considerable best, knowing what chaos is going on around them outside in the classical, instrumental and operatic world. It is necessary to love singers; if you don't, they won't bloom. Some people love them here, and so their voices are sprouting.

Verdi: Un Ballo in Maschera; Cairo Opera Company and Cairo Opera Orchestra; Ivan Filev, conductor; Kouzman Popov, director; Main Hall, Cairo Opera House; 27 and 29 June

The short overture to this, one of the finest of all Verdi's works, set the tone. The playing was *sotto voce*, hushed and melodic. It presents Verdi the man almost more than any other of his operas: fastidious, possessed and, in spite of his background, rather an admirer of the wicked world he castigated. All is vanitas, but Verdi adored the panoply of great position. This performance was one of the very finest things the Cairo Opera House has offered in a while. Care, respect, even love for *Ballo*, showed in every aspect.

Decor: dark, but visible — coloured Spanish, rich rotten reds and bronzes, but no splashes into cabaret. If you want a Sunday pictorial *Ballo*, better look elsewhere. This one is conventional but has class.

The orchestra played well. Filev never lets things drag, nor does he explode everything *fortissimo*. He searches the delicate score and gives a really fascinating account of all its hidden glories, but in the arching Verdian spaces needed at some of the climaxes, we were totally underfed.

The cast. King: Hassan Kami. One of his best, if not the best, thing he has done for years. Voice firm, clear and often deeply baritonal as is demanded. Appearance elegant, quick-footed, well-shod, in proper princely boots this time. Fine swirl of cloaks. He loves them and loves characters, like Don Carlos, built on sympathy, none of whom are to blame for their own deaths.

Renato: Fernando Belaza (27 June) and Duk Hee Cho (29 June). Cho is much better than Belaza. Very sympathetic, full of dramatic appeal and his voice dark and firm. Cho's *Eri Tuo* aria and the big trio following it were splendid. He went behind the voice to the character. He and Kami disclosed the truly tragic core of the work.

Oscar: Nashwa Ibrahim (27 June) — a firm and clear voice, stocky in appearance— and Dalia Farouk (29 June) giving a first performance. Farouk looked almost too young but sounded right. A high perspective voice cutting clearly through orchestra and chorus. She acted rather coy but it suited the character. Her arias were perfectly round and she deserved her ovation at the end. Another recruit for the Opera.

Mary Robinson, new to the role of Amelia (29 June), has style, taste and passion and she looks good, but the voice is not a true *spinta* soprano. And this Amelia must have. As it was, she was too light at the centre. She made Amelia a gamin and Amelia is a grande dame for sure. She looked like Gilda not Marie Antoinette on her way to the scaffold.

On the first of the two performances, on 27 June, Iman Mustafa sang Amelia. It was the best thing she has ever done at the opera. In her present state she has ironed out her voice's tendency to spread under pressure. She has never lacked voice, but now the bloom shines and she alone genuinely arched her sound into Verdian suspension bridges of thrilling power. She is the true *spinta* type Amelia needs.

This *Ballo* was refreshing and helped to show that the Cairo Opera is making its effort to keep music drama alive under difficult conditions.

Talents; Cairo Symphony Orchestra; Abdel-Hamid Mustafa Ismail, conductor; Nader Abbassi (bass) and Philippe Doss (piano); Goumhouriya Theatre; 28 June

No more beautiful sound ever came from an orchestra than those which open Weber's overture to his last opera *Oberon* based on Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream*. The dream of the opening could go on forever — but after some minutes there is a pistol-like crack from the orchestra and the magico-fluto of *Oberon* begins.

And here was another unexpected treasure, the evening's conductor Abdel-Hamid Mustafa Ismail from Alexandria. What organisational talent! All evening his energy struck new approach and feeling. It is not the notes but the message that matters— this is a philosophy of music-making which can make wonders as he did.

First we heard Philippe Doss at the piano in Mozart's Rondo in D major K382. Variations sparkling and darting, a runaway pony of a piece. Doss is 12 years old, but sitting at the piano he looks six. Abroad, 1997 is seeing a plethora of baby pianists, each with its own loving PR group and big manager stationed in Los Angeles, so Doss is by no means unique. He has learned from Ushida how to stab Mozart and get away with it. His stabs are electric and so is his left hand and his sense of presence. Did he come out of the Internet? With such a conductor to aid and abet him, his times and rhythms produced a unique show.

Nader Abbassi next gave Six Romances by Shostakovich from poems by Walter Raleigh and Shakespeare. Very gripping music. They were sung in Russian and we had no words. Strange invocations, never loud or noisy. Bells sounded in one song, some sad, some maybe mad, but all well sung. Abbassi demonstrated how to sing words to music and make an atmosphere alive.

Last came Beethoven, a difficult symphony — no. two, which is on the move throughout, full of pitfalls. It is edgy, Beethoven on the move, far from the beaten track of the madding crowd.

The conductor knew every turn of the music. It never glowers. The beetling brows of Beethoven are for later. But there is always sun, even rainbow. After dark moments, the whole thing shone brilliantly. In such a conductor, Cairo has a diamond in its vault.

Listings

EXHIBITIONS

Valparaiso
Cervantes Institute for Spanish Culture, Alexandria annex, 101 El-Horreya Avenue, Alexandria.
An exhibit of lithographs, postcards and photographs.

Claire Zahnd
Mubarak Public Library premises, 4 El-Tahawia St, off El-Nil St, Giza. Tel 336 0291. Daily exc Tues, 11am-7pm. Until 4 July.
Books, etchings, lithographs and calligraphic works under the title Singular-Plural.

Collective Exhibition
Khan El-Maghraby Gallery, 18 El-Mansour Mohamed St, Zamalek. Tel 340 3349. Daily exc Sun, 10.30am-3pm & 4.30pm-9pm. Until 5 July.
Hassan Abdel-Fattah, Omar Abdel-Zaher, Fathy Afifi, Hassan El-Sharq, Emad Ibrahim, Ahmed Selim and Mohamed Oraby.

Adel Thabet (Oils & pastels)
Dania Gallery, 20 Abdel-Aziz Gawish St, corner of Mohamed Mahmoud St, Borg El-Attebba', Bab El-Louq. Tel 355 8367. Daily exc Fri, 12pm-10pm. Until 17 July.
Forty-five works displayed under the title "From Cairo to the Beaches".

Escalon
Zeinab Khatoun House, behind El-Azhar Mosque. Tel 340 7942. Open throughout the day. Until 17 July.
Works by the Mexican artist under the title Faces of the World.

Milton Glaser
Sony Gallery, Main Campus, American University in Cairo, Mohamed Mahmoud St. Tel 357 5424. Daily exc Fri & Sat, 9am-12pm & 6pm-9pm. Until 31 July.
Posters and book covers, store designs and toy creations, magazine formats and logotypes are on display at the artist's first exhibition in the Middle East.

Ahmed Mounib (Paintings)
Exhibition Hall, Al-Ahram Building, El-Galaa St, Boulaq. Tel 5786100. Daily 9am-10pm. Until the end of the month.
Landscape paintings under the title Dialogue Between Nature and The Artist.

Suzanne Mubarak Children's Museum
34 Abu Bakr El-Seddiq St, Heliopolis. Tel 249 9915. Daily exc Mon, 9am-2pm.

The Museum of Mr and Mrs Mohamed Mahmoud Khalil
1 Kafour El-Akhshid St, Dokki. Tel 336 2376. Daily exc Mon, 10am-6pm.
Egypt's largest collection of nineteenth century European art, amassed by the late Mahmoud Khalil and his wife, includes works by Courbet, Van Gogh, Gauguin, and Rodin and a host of impressionist works, housed in the villa once belonging to the Khalils and converted into a museum with little, if any, expense spared. There are also a number of excellent orientalist works.

Egyptian Museum
Tahrir Sq, Downtown. Tel 575 4319. Daily exc Fri, 8am-5pm; Fri 9am-11.15am & 1pm-3pm.
The world's largest collection of Pharaonic and Ptolemaic treasures, including massive granite statues and the smallest household objects used by the Ancient Egyptians, along with, of course, the controversial mummies room. A perennial must.

Coptic Museum
Mar Girgis, Old Cairo. Tel 362 8766. Daily exc Fri, 9am-4pm; Fri 9am-11am & 1pm-3pm.
Founded in 1910, the museum houses a distinguished collection of Coptic art and artefacts, including textiles, manuscripts, icons and architectural features in a purpose built structure in the heart of the Coptic city.

Islamic Museum
Port Said St, Ahmed Maher St, Bab El-Khalq. Tel 390 9930/390 1520. Daily exc Fri, 9am-4pm; Fri 9am-11.30am & 2pm-4pm.
A vast collection of Islamic arts and crafts including *mashrabiya*, lustreware ceramics, textiles, woodwork, coins and manuscripts drawn from Egypt's Fatimid, Ayyubid and Mamelukе periods and from other countries in the Islamic world.

Museum of Modern Egyptian Art
Opera House Grounds, Gezira. Tel 340 6861. Daily exc Mon, 10am-1pm & 5pm-9pm.
A permanent display of paintings and sculpture charting the modern art movement in Egypt from its earliest pioneers to latest practitioners. A state of the art museum housing the contemporary art of the state.

Mohamed Nagui Museum
Château Pyramids, 9 Mahmoud Al-Guindi St, Giza.
A museum devoted to the paintings of Mohamed Nagui (1888-1956), the Alexandrian aristocrat who is considered one of the pioneers of the modern Egyptian art movement.

Mahmoud Mukhtar Museum
Tahrir St, Gezira. Daily exc Sun and Mon, 9am-1.30pm.
A permanent collection of works by the sculptor Mahmoud Mukhtar (d. 1934), whose granite monument to Saad Zaghloul stands near Qasr El-Nil Bridge, and whose Egypt Awakening became, somewhat belatedly, an icon of post revolutionary Egypt.

FILMS

The School
Japanese Information and Culture Centre, 106 Qasr El-Aini St, Garden City. 3 July, 6pm.
Directed by Shingo Yamashiro (1989).

Shan
Maulana Abul-Kalam Azad Centre for Indian Culture, 27 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 392 5162. 3 July, 4.30pm.

Indian Cultural Festival for Children
The latest Indian films for children, clay modelling, floor designs, kite making, yoga, Hindustani music, exhibitions, books, documentaries, dolls, and more at the Integrated Care Society, Heliopolis. Until August. For more information, contact the Information Service of the Indian Embassy, 37 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 392 5243/ 392 5162/3927573.

Commercial cinemas change their programmes every Monday. The information provided is valid through to Sunday after which it is wise to check with the cinemas. Arabic films are seldom subtitled. For information, contact the venue.

Let Us Celebrate

Ransom
Ramsis Hilton I, Corniche El-Nil St. Tel 574 7436. Daily 1.30pm, 330pm, 6.30pm, 9.30pm & midnight. El-Horreya I, El-Horreya Mall, Roxy, Heliopolis. Tel 452 9980. Daily 1pm, 3pm, 6pm, & 9pm. Karim I, 15 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 924 830. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. El-Haram, El-Haram St, Giza. Tel 385 8358. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.
With Mel Gibson.

The English Patient
El-Horreya II, El-Horreya Mall, Roxy, Heliopolis. Tel 452 9980. Daily 1pm, 3pm, 6pm, & 9pm. Ramsis Hilton II, Corniche El-Nil St. Tel 574 7436. Daily 1.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm, 9.30pm & midnight. MGM, Kolleyat El-Nasr Sq, Maadi. Tel 352 3066. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.
With Willem Dafoe and Juliette Binoche in the 9 Oscar awards-winning hit.

Sleepers
Tahrir, 112 Tahrir St, Dokki. Tel 335 4726. Daily 1pm, 3pm, 6pm, 9pm & Thur-Sat, midnight. Normandy, 31 El-Ahram St, Heliopolis. Tel 258 0254. Daily 12.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. Cosmos II, 12 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 779 537. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.
With Robert De Niro, Dustin Hoffman, Brad Pitt and Kevin Bacon.

Romeo and Juliet
Karim II, 15 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 924 830. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.
Quite an impressive adaptation of William Shakespeare's dramatic language to a very contemporary setting, replete with black leather jackets and neon lights.

Space Jam
New Odeon II, as above. Daily 10.30am, 1.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.
With Michael Jordan and Buggs Bunny.

Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde
New Odeon III, as above. Daily 10.30am, 1.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.
A comic adaptation, this time.

Man of The House
El-Salam, 65 Abdel-Hamid Badawi St, Heliopolis. Tel 293 1072. Daily 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.
With Chevy Chase and Jonathan Taylor Thomas.

Hazzemni Ya...
New Odeon I, 4 Abdel-Hamid Said St, Downtown. Tel 575 8797. Daily 10.30am, 1.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. Radio, 24 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 575 6562. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Metro, 35 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 393 3897. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Cairo Sheraton, El-Galaa St, Giza. Tel 360 6081. Daily 10.30am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm, 9pm & midnight. Rivoli II, 26 July St, Downtown. Tel 575 5053. Daily 1pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm 8pm & 10pm. Cosmos I, 12 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 779 537. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.
Fifi Abdou's play filmed and screened.

Toffaha (A Girl Called Apple)
Roxy, Roxy Sq, Heliopolis. Tel 258 0344. Daily 10am, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Diana Palace, 17 El-Alfi St, Emadeddin, Downtown. Tel 924 727. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Rivoli I, 26 July St, Downtown. Tel 575 5053. Daily 1pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. Tiba I, Nasr City. Tel 262 9407. Daily 10.30am, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.
With Leila Elwi and Magued El-Masri.

Eish El-Ghorab (Mushroom)
Tiba II, Nasr City. Tel 262 9407. Daily 10.30am, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. Miami, 38 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 574 5656. Daily noon, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Sphinx, Sphinx Sq, Mohandessin. Tel 346 4017. Daily 8pm.
With Nour El-Sherif and Yousra.

Bekhit Wa Adila II (Bekhit and Adila II)
Lido, 23 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 934 284. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.
With Adel Imam and Sherine.

DANCE

Korean Ballet
Main Hall, Opera House, Gezira. Tel 341 2926. 3 July, 9pm.

MUSIC

A Guitar, A Moon and The Nile
El-Hanager, Opera House grounds, Gezira. Tel 340 6861. 7 July, 8pm.
A fusion of traditional and western music.
With Gamal Lotfy (qanoun), Khaled El-Hamamy (keyboard), Ihab Radwan (guitar).

Egyptian Traditional Takht
Open Air Theatre, Opera House, Gezira. Tel 341 2926. 3 July, 9pm.

Cairo Opera Children's Choir
Main Summer Hall, Opera House, as above. 4 July, 9pm.

Egyptian Strings
Open Air Theatre, Opera House, as above. 5 July, 9pm.
Music and songs from the traditional repertoire.

Jazz Concert
Open Air Theatre, Opera House, as above. 6 July, 9pm.
Yehia Khalil performs.

National Folklore Troupe
Open Air Theatre, Opera House, as above. 7 July, 9pm.

THEATRE

Le'b 'Eyal (Children's Play)
George Abiad Hall, National Theatre, Ataba Sq. Tel 591 7783. Daily 9.30pm.
With Mona Zaki, Khaled El-Nabawi and Rania Farid Shawqi.

Mama America
Qasr El-Nil Theatre, Qasr El-Nil St. Tel 575 0761. Wed & Thur 10pm, Fri 8pm.
Starring and directed by Mohamed Sobhy.

'A'elat Wanis (Wanis' Family)
Qasr El-Nil Theatre, as above. Sat & Sun, 10pm, Mon 8pm.
Directed by Mohamed Sobhy and starring all the family members of the televised series.

All information correct at time of going to press. However, it remains wise to check with venues first, since programmes, dates and times are subject to change at very short notice.

Please telephone or send information to Listings, *Al-Ahram Weekly*, Galaa St, Cairo.
Tel 5786064.
Fax 5786089/833.

Compiled by
Injy El-Kashef

Around the galleries

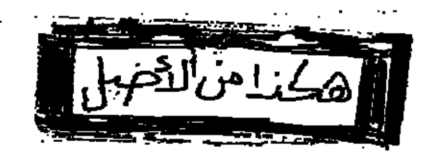


Mohamed Mandour

CERAMIC pieces by **Mohamed Mandour** are currently showing at **Picasso Gallery** in Zamalek. Displaying an impressive technical virtuosity, and a sensitive approach to design, the pieces on show confirm Mandour's mastery of his medium.

The Centre for International Cultural Cooperation, also in Zamalek, shows paintings, watercolours, ink drawings and collages — 34 in all — by **Mustafa Ebeid**. Ebeid uses a vast range of materials, though whatever the medium the actual material is invariably made to conform with the kind of loaded abstract expressionism that forms the unmistakable key-note of this exhibition.

Reviewed by **Nagwa El-Ashri**



The culture of imperialism

As scholars from the Arab world and the West gather in Beirut to discuss the work of Edward Said at a major conference, Eqbal Ahmed, to whom Said dedicated *Culture and Imperialism*, argues that sectarian ideas, justified by the idea of the white man's burden, are no longer the exclusive province of colonial administrators. From Conrad to *Star Trek*, the culture of "us" and "them" — our redemption, their destruction — has gone global



General Allenby's official entry into Aleppo in March 1919: "The culture of imperialism... is not Western any more. Rather, it enjoys hegemony; it has become global

The expansions which followed Christopher Columbus's voyage to the Americas resulted in the destruction of great civilisations — the Aztec, Inca and Maya. The Indians of North America suffered a similar fate. Nearly all of God's creation, including land and labour, were turned into commodities in the capitalist sense of the word. People were kidnapped, bought, transported and sold. The demographic colour of continents changed, with white settlers and black slaves displacing the brown natives in the Americas and the Caribbean. A world system of unparalleled political, economic and cultural dimensions was created and continually reinforced by new technology. In the industrial age, the expansionist drive moved on to Asia and Africa, most of which was colonised. At the start of the 20th century, nearly all of the world's non-Western peoples were under some form of Western domination, and remain hopelessly trapped in structures of extreme inequality which is not merely economic.

"The conquest of earth, which means the taking it away from those who have a different complexion or slightly flatter noses than ourselves, is not a pretty thing when you look into it too much," wrote Joseph Conrad in *Heart of Darkness*, a novel set in Congo, which was colonised by Belgium at the turn of the century. Conrad, who sailed up the Congo River in 1890, witnessed the enterprise that cost an estimated ten million lives. He betrays but little empathy for the African victims and none whatsoever for their history or culture. The "heart of darkness" is situated, nevertheless, in Europe, not Africa, in London and Brussels, and, above all, in Kurtz, the legendary agent of the Belgian company — "his mother was half English, his father was half French" — who symbolises corporate greed, inhumanity in extremis and the quest of redemption in an idea. "All Europe", wrote Conrad, "contributed to the making of Kurtz." How could an enlightened civilisation engage in so "not a pretty thing"?

Conrad's answer is implied in the above quotation: do not "look into it too much". That requires the complicity of intellectuals. From inertia and ignorance no less than active belief in the imperial mission, the intellectuals of the West complied by and large. The fate of the great hemispheric civilisations merited but a rare and eccentric recording. Until very recently, we knew little about the holocaust in the Congo which continued right into the twentieth century. We did not hear about the struggles in which civilisations perished and some 200 million people died until a battle occurred in which a Custer was killed or a Gordon was besieged.

The habit of not looking into it too much persists: since the end of the Vietnam war in 1975, not one major work of history, art, or cinema has examined the Vietnamese experience of the American intervention. By contrast, America's experience of Vietnam has yielded a significant body of analysis and narrative. Or take a recent instance: as thieves and killers go, Mobutu, who fell from power recently, a likeness of King Leopold I, was sustained for three decades by Washington and Paris. How much did we know of his doings until the spring of 1997? Excavation of continually suppressed truths remains one of the great intellectual tasks of our information age. Governments — democratic and otherwise — do not make this task easy. I have just learned that the CIA has destroyed the records of its murderous Third World interventions, including its overthrow in 1953 of Dr Mohamed Mossadegh's elected government in Iran.

Conrad suggest another mechanism of rescuing imperial conscience: "What redeems it is the idea only. An idea at the back of it; not a sentimental pretense but an idea; and an unselfish belief in the idea — something you can set up and bow down before, and offer a sacrifice to..." We all know the idea from popularised redemptive phrases — White Man's Burden, La Mission Civilisatrice, Manifest Destiny. Like all mobilising slogans, these were merely the lowest common denominator of the imperial consensus. Notions of racial superiority and divine ordination, the contrast between the West's higher mission and the native's humble reality, were not the only ideas that redeemed imperialism.

Beginning with Edward Said's *Orientalism*, first published in 1979, a significant body of works in criticism, history, and cultural studies have excavated the deep roots and complex structures of imperial ideologies. They took many forms which have penetrated deep into our knowledge systems and consciousness, both Western and non-Western.

Boundaries were drawn to deny our common humanity. An ideology of difference possessed the empires' intellectuals and administrators. They had a mania for classifying people and viewed each as a distinct, necessarily divisible entity. Easy intermingling of peoples was regarded as somehow unnatural. Edward Said points to how the English were astonished to find Muslims, Christians and Jews socialising as though they were not different species. So in the novel *Tancred*, one of Disraeli's characters quips that "Arabs are simply Jews on horseback, and all are Orientals at heart". The policy of divide and rule flowed easily from this sectarian outlook.

While the menace of miscegenation haunted imperial cultures and barriers of policy and social sanctions were erected to prevent it, complex mechanisms emerged to break the barriers to conquest and domination. There was the notion of mystery, as in the mysterious east, an invitation to exploration. Mysteries, after all, demand solution by enlightened, knowledgeable men. Or the idea of darkness, as in the dark continent to which one should bring light. Or the notion of empty lands, which of course needed filling up. Or the literature on identifiable, collective minds — the Arab mind, Hindu mind, etc. — that is still prevalent. All led to a set of common conclusions: they are not like us. They are different. Hence, they can be treated differently, according to standards other than those that apply in civilised places. The outlook was so embedded in civilisation that it traversed centuries. One finds strange bedfellows, separated in time and space. "We must save Chile from the irresponsibility of its people," Henry Kissinger was reported to have said while proceeding to de-stabilise the elected government of Salvadore Allende. A century earlier, Karl Marx had written: "They cannot represent themselves. They have to be represented." Third World dictators give precisely this argument to justify their tyranny.

This culture is pervasive; it cuts across continents and penetrates our outlook by a variety of mediums. As I outline this talk on the flight from Islamabad to New York, Pakistan International Airlines shows *Star Trek: First Contact*. I watch what looks like a hi-tech, outer space replay of an earlier voyage into an 'undiscovered' world. Commander Jean-Luc Picard plays a modern-day Cortes, leading the crew of the newly commissioned Enterprise E to war against the Borgs — "an insidious race", informs the PIA flier.

These "half-organic aliens" appear like Indians in the early Westerns — mysteriously, ubiquitiously and sometimes seductively. Violence flows freely as "contact" is made. Fallen aliens are shot even as they beg for mercy. Captain Jean-Luc Picard and his crew commit quite a holocaust with an insouciance we are expected to appreciate only because they have vanquished an alien race — mysterious, dangerous, seductive and, ultimately, vulnerable. The Borgs have no individual identity, only a collective one. Their defeat is deemed final only when their roots are destroyed, when their head, which assures life's motion to the entire race, is cut off. An idea redeems this "mission": once contact has been made, the world will change. Promises Captain Picard: "Poverty, disease, and war will end."

Star Trek is but a crude, popular expression of the culture of imperialism. This culture is not Western any more. Rather, it enjoys hegemony; it has become global. Note an irony: Pakistan International Airlines, which will not serve wine to passengers, happily serves up Captain Picard on its flights.

A saunter with the ancients

Mawsou'at Tarikh Masr 'Abr Al-Usour: Tarikh Masr Al-Qadima (Encyclopedia of Egyptian History: Ancient Egypt), Abdel-Aziz Saleh, Gamal Mukhtar, Mohamed Ibrahim Bakr, Ibrahim Noshi and Farouk El-Qadi. Cairo: General Egyptian Book Organisation, 1997

A miniature encyclopedia (530 pages), this volume nevertheless manages exhaustive coverage of the diverse aspects of Egypt in the Pharaonic, Ptolemaic and Roman eras. Written for the lay reader, the encyclopedia nevertheless avoids any lapses into pedestrianism and over-simplification. While four chapters are devoted to Pharaonic Egypt, the Ptolemaic and the Roman eras get a single chapter each.

Manethon, an invaluable source on Ancient Egypt, wrote a chronology of the Pharaonic dynasties in the third century BC, covering a period from 3,200 to the fourth century BC. Drawing on Manethon's chronology, modern historians have also supplemented his dynastic records with information about the pre-historic era. The author pauses at length at the beginnings of agrarianism in Egypt towards the end of the Stone Age, examining the causes of this development (the regular Nile flood) and its economic and social ramifications.

Egyptian civilisation during this period was centred around Beni Salama, Fayoum, Deir Tassa, El-Badari and the two Nagada civilisations, the first and the second. And it was during this time, at the dawn of recorded history, that attempts to forge political unity began, coinciding with the development of writing systems necessary to ensure cohesive religious and administrative bureaucracies. By the time the Pyramids were built, a centralised state had been established, boasting a coherent religious system with god-kings at the helm.

In the section dedicated to the late Old Kingdom, which witnessed the beginning of the collapse of a centralised monarchic system, Gamal Mukhtar records the first major Egyptian social uprising against privileges and inequality, an uprising which had important ramifications on the development of religious creeds.

Mukhtar is keen to show how, during the Middle Kingdom, literature flourished and the cult of Osiris gained wide popularity among the masses. Simultaneously with these developments was the beginning of incursions by nomadic tribes such as the Hyksos, exploiting the relative weakness of central authority. The Hyksos were able to rule over Egypt throughout the period of the 15th and the 16th dynasties until the princes of Thebes were able to chase them to the border.

In the section dedicated to the more recent dynasties Mohamed Ibrahim Bakr deals, in the volume's longest chapter, with one of the richest periods of Ancient Egyptian history which witnessed the building of a great Egyptian empire. The period begins with King Ahmose, who not only expelled the Hyksos but also built defences to safeguard the borders and reunited Nubia with Egypt. The armies of Amenhotep were able to reach regions near the Euphrates and Thutmose III led sixteen military campaigns which lasted for 20 years and are all recorded on the walls of the Temple of Karnak.

Beside the great military achievements of the period, the New Kingdom also witnessed a flurry of civil activities, in the domain of trade and major construction works. As is well known, the age of Hatshepsut and Thutmose was characterised by great economic development which allowed for developments in arts, literature and religion, thus paving the way for the first monotheistic revolution in history — that of Akhenaton. In a second chapter, Bakr deals with the later ages which witnessed the ascendancy of rulers from hybrid origins, be they from the Western Desert or from tribes who lived in the oases in that desert. This period lasted for two centuries during which a ruling family of Ethiopian stock reached the throne. A short period of rebellions follows before the Persians, under the leadership of Cambyses, conquered Egypt, thus ushering in the decline of Ancient Egyptian civilisation. Henceforth, begins the pattern of foreign invasion and uprisings, culminating in the appearance of ever stronger invaders.

The Persian colonisation of Egypt ended when Alexander of Macedon took the world by storm with his crushing defeat of the Persians and his conquest of Egypt in 332BC. Naturally, the following chapter of the encyclopedia, written by Ibrahim Noshi, deals with Alexander's conquest of Egypt and the Ptolemies. Noshi tracks the history of Egypt following Alexander's departure when Egypt fell to the lot of Ptolemy I who developed an independent maritime empire in the eastern Mediterranean. This chapter deals with the various members of the Ptolemaic dynasty up to Ptolemy V, when political and social unrest swept the country ushering the beginnings of the end of Ptolemaic rule.

In the sixth and last chapter of the encyclopedia, Farouk El-Qadi deals with Egypt under Roman rule, beginning with Cleopatra's famous death scene days after the fall of Alexandria to Octavius in 30 BC. The Ptolemies had spent three centuries in Egypt while the Romans managed to rule Egypt for almost seven centuries. While the former had displayed discretion in ruling one of the then most civilised nations of the world, the Romans had great disdain for the Alexandrians, their notables and priesthood. Augustus issued orders to his commander in Egypt, Petronius, to take over most of the endowments of the religious institution making of it state property and part of the possessions of the Roman Empire. An annual tax per head was also levied, decreed by Augustus. Thus Egypt was reduced to a granary exporting wheat to the Roman Empire.

Roman rule in Egypt was marked by many insurgencies, such as the uprising of the Jews during Trajan's rule and the revolution of Delta peasants under Marcus Aurelius. Then came the Roman persecutions of Christians before the new religion was approved.

Egypt was thus perfectly prepared for the Arab conquest which ended seven centuries of Roman oppression and injustice.

Reviewed by ***Mahmoud El-Wardani***

Gloom and boom

Hong Kong: Culture and Politics of Disappearance, Akbar Abbas, Mineapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1997

Watercolour by unknown artist, showing Hong Kong circa 1860, with the cathedral church (1849) and other developments that took place after the island became a colony of the British Crown

"Living in interesting times is a dubious advantage, in fact, a curse according to an old Chinese saying. Interesting times are periods of violent transitions and uncertainty. People in Hong Kong, faced with the prospect of 1997, clearly live in interesting times. The city's history has always followed an unexpected course — from fishing village to British colony to global city to one of China's Special Administrative Region," Akbar Abbas writes in *Hong Kong: Culture and the Politics of Disappearance* — a timely and thoroughly entertaining publication.

These are certainly interesting times for Hong Kong people, but the handover from British to Chinese rule was certainly no violent transition. However, the author seems to share the sense of unease that many professionals, artists and intellectuals in Hong Kong feel about the handover. He was born and bred in Hong Kong and his father hails from a family of Muslim South Asian origin who emigrated to Hong Kong last century and became thoroughly Sinoised.

I first met Akbar Abbas some years ago in New York at the flat of pop star Sola, the "Madonna" of China's early 1980s. The two were married a couple of months ago and Abbas is now thinking of settling down in the United States where his wife has been exiled for some years now. Until this year, he taught comparative literature at the University of Hong Kong even though he paid regular visits to America. He held appointments at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Tsing Hua University of Taiwan, and Northwestern University in the US.

So what prompted his decision to move to New York? I read his coffee cup and, to my surprise and his delight, most of what I told him about his past turned out to be true. I told him about his two teenage sons studying in England, and about his difficult first marriage. He stared incredulously at the coffee cup. The Chinese, like the Egyptians, are rather superstitious and somewhat fatalistic. We became friends. We are both incurable hypochondriacs, and I desribed his many ailments with deliberate precision savouring every moment of the looks of undisguised horror and mortification he gave me.

My next encounter with Akbar Abbas was in Cairo. A well-known Hong Kong photographer, Dodo, who brought out a book with exquisite images of Egypt last year, had come to Cairo to take snapshots of both the city and the countryside. He is fond of writing monographs on modern Chinese painting and photography. He was writing the text to accompany Dodo's photographs. It was then that I first sensed his obsession with space — and especially spacial palimpsest. He loved Cairo presisely because it comprises so many overlapping spacial palimpsests. Hong Kong, too, was full of spacial palimpsests — ultra-modern buildings with space-age designs surrounded by traditional Chinese scaffolding and turn-of-the-century colonial buildings entrapped between art deco apartment blocs.

"A palimpsest of another sort was the fantastic sum of HK$9.5 million paid recently by a property developer for the "lucky" automobile licence number "2": lucky because two in Chinese is the homonym of the word "easy" and because the number two, shaped like a rooster (if we stretch our imaginations a bit), was purchased in the year of the rooster. On one level, we can see this as simply old-fashioned superstition, a case of numerancy and a waste of money. But we could also see it, on another level, as money well spent in the purchase of what amounts almost to a company logo, a smart investment in the society of the spectacle."

As I read on I was entranced with that "society of the spectacle" that the author, the sensitive and vulnerable friend I knew, was describing in charming prose.

"The rise of globalism spells the end of old empires, but not before the offspring of these empires, the previous colonial cities, have been primed to perform well as global cities," Abbas writes. That is especially true of Hong Kong. Abbas notes the "strange dialectic between autonomy and dependency" that characterises Hong Kong's relationship with both Britain and China. "Hong Kong is primarily a space of facilitation."

Akbar stresses that in Hong Kong the inability to participate effectively in politics forces people to turn their attention to making money and spending it. "Historical imagination, the citizen's belief that they might have a hand in shaping their own history, gets replaced by speculation on the property or stock markets, or by an obsession with fashion or consumerism. If you cannot choose your political leaders, you can at least choose your own clothes. We find therefore not an atmosphere of doom and gloom, but the more paradoxical phenomenon of gloom and boom: the more frustrated or blocked the aspirations to 'democracy' are, the more the market booms," Abbas writes.

The crux of the matter is that what sets Hong Kong apart from China is the fact that Hong Kong owes its very existence to Britain's historical intervention in Chinese affairs. "Ironically, it is Hong Kong's colonial history, the only history it has known and a history that cannot be forgotten overnight, that distanced Hong Kong culturally and politically from China and that will make their relationship not simply one of reunification," as Abbas so aptly puts it. "The history of Hong Kong, in terms of what it has become today, has effectively been a history of colonialism."

Reviewed by ***Gamal Nkrumah***

Plain Talk

I am a great believer in cultural exchange, and have always felt that culture is in fact the most effective channel in furthering international understanding. In this the age of information, cultural exchanges can be effected by simply pressing a button. When I was in Philadelphia, and here I hark back to a subject I mentioned in my last article, I was greatly impressed by the amount of information on Egypt I found stored in computers and on the Internet.

From Egypt's national heroes, Urabi and Saad Zaghloul for instance, to our most significant 20th century writers — Taha Hussein, Tawfik El-Hakim, Youssef Idris, Salah Abdel-Sabbour, to mention a few — complete and comprehensive files existed in the library's computers. Their original works in Arabic and English translations, books about them and biographies, are there for the asking.

Yet, however important and effective computer and Internet treasures might be, I still believe there is nothing like face-to-face contact and hands on experience. It is not enough, I think, to know the minutest details of Egypt on computer or the Internet: one must come into direct contact with Egyptians to develop any real understanding of our way of life and thinking.

This is what makes the work of such organisations as the Binational Fulbright Commission in Egypt of great importance. I was newly reminded of its noble job when the Commission contacted me, asking me to give a lecture in a seminar from 1 July to 27 July 1997, organised for a group of selected US educators and providing a unique study and travel opportunity to improve and enhance their knowledge and understanding of the history and contemporary issues facing Egypt and the Middle East region in general.

I shall participate in a panel on Egyptian literature, alongside other panels dealing with diverse issues in our country. The US Department of Education selected the 16 college and university faculty, elementary and secondary school teachers and curriculum specialists who will participate. The group, which has been carefully chosen, have a wide range of interests.

Going through the list of participants I was greatly impressed by both their qualifications and specialisation as well as their prospective projects. An interesting participant is Mr Mark Hogensen, instructor of Art of Pal Alto College, San Antonio, Texas, who has submitted a project intended to create a visual record documenting the diversity that exists in Egypt through photos and sketches. He aims at examining the influences of Ancient Egyptian legacy on contemporary architects, artists and school curricula. He has expressed his desire to visit museums and galleries. I hope that, apart from the Egyptian Museum, which I am certain will be included in his itinerary, he will have a chance of visiting the Museum of Modern Egyptian Art and the Wissa Wassef Harrania project as well as some extant buildings by the celebrated architect Hassan Fathi.

One participant whom I must mention since she comes from Philadelphia, from where I have just returned, is Mrs Maria Mills-Torres, curriculum specialist and teacher of French and Spanish at the Philadelphia Schools Department. Her project is to enhance the cultural appreciation of the ancient peoples of Egypt through studying art and archeological artifacts. She has quite an ambitious goal, to develop a pen-pal network for students and teachers, and to explain the feasibility of a teleconference or two-way video conference activity. I suggest, if I may, that she should meet with Dr Mohamed Saleh, director of the Egyptian Museum, and Dr Zaki Hawas who, incidentally, contributed to the organisation of the Egyptian section at the Art Museum of Philadelphia.

There are other, rather more specific, projects dealing with the writings of Hassan El-Bana, Sayed Qutb and Hassan Turabi, on government structure and the role of citizens in government, on Islamic art, on the effects of pollution on monuments, on the role of women in Egyptian society, and on cultural conflict in the Arab world.

This is quite an ambitious overall project and the first of its kind. We heartily welcome our American guests and we look forward to their future role of enhancing genuine and first-hand knowledge of Egypt.

Mursi Saad El-Din

History for sale

A turn-of-the-century bookshop attached to Wikalat Abul-Dahab is soon to be rented out to the highest bidder. Gihan Shahine wonders why

"It would break my heart to see the bookshop built by Mohamed Ali Sobeih being auctioned off," laments Ali Sobeih, a member of the family which has inherited the bookshop attached to Wikalat Abul-Dahab. Ali's cousins forced him to sell his part of the shop. "The new owner may very well turn it into a bazaar or a supermarket," he says incredulously. "It is like killing history."

The bookshop in Wikalat Abul-Dahab was established by Mohamed Ali Sobeih in 1900. It was also a print shop where the *1,001 Nights* and many other masterpieces of Arab and Islamic culture were first printed on a large scale. The bookshop was known throughout the Arab world and was considered a centre of enlightenment. Famous sheikhs of Al-Azhar, like religious reformer Mohamed Abduh, had their books printed there.

The historical significance of the bookstore also stems from its location. It is an integral part of Wikalat Abul-Dahab, an Ottoman-period commercial storehouse and inn built by Mohamed Bey Abul-Dahab in 1772. Today, the bookshop affords the only access to the *wikala*, which also has a *sabil* (fountain), drinking trough, and *tikiyya* (hospice) on its premises. Above the bookshop is the 200-year-old Khan El-Zarakesha, renowned for its beautiful façade and intricate *mashrabiya*.

Attached to the *wikala* is a mosque, built by the Emir Abul-Dahab in 1774. The splendid minaret and dome are characteristic of Ottoman architectural traditions. The Emir Abul-Dahab is buried inside the mosque itself.

"The mosque and the *wikala* have historical significance," says Farouk Askar, head of the Islamic Museum. The mosque, he recounts, was the last one constructed before Mohamed Ali's mosque at the Citadel, which was built 66 years later. It was considered an extension of Al-Azhar, the mosque-university attended by students who flocked to Cairo from all over the Muslim world. Students unable to find lodgings on the premises of Al-Azhar were housed in the *wikala* instead.

The Emir Abul-Dahab was a mamluk in the court of Ali Bey El-Kabir, an Ottoman ruler of Egypt and Syria. Abul-Dahab had occupied many positions and bought many mamluks of his own, gradually rising in the ranks of power. He eventually succeeded in overthrowing his master and taking his place as ruler of Egypt. Ali Bey El-Kebir fled to Syria and returned with an army, his mind set on reconquering Egypt, but Abul-Dahab won the battle and tightened his grip over the Ottoman provinces of Egypt and Syria, which remained virtually autonomous under his rule, as they had been under that of his master.

Like many other Muslim rulers, Mohamed Bey Abul-Dahab was concerned with preparing for the next world by multiplying his pious works in this one. Income-generating projects were established to maintain charitable foundations destined to benefit the poor. The revenues from the *wikala* built by Abul-Dahab, for instance, would have served in part to maintain the fountain he had constructed. As such, the *wikala* and the other facilities on the premises are prime examples not only of Ottoman architecture as it evolved in Egypt, but also of a tradition adhered to by a line of rulers beginning with Amr Ibn Al-Aas.

Today, however, no one seems interested in saving the *wikala* or the mosque built by Abul-Dahab. Neglected, crumbling slowly, they stand next to the mosque of Al-Azhar, where restoration work is at a peak. Only a few months ago, fliers were being distributed to passersby announcing that Sobeih's bookstore was to be auctioned off. Starting bids were estimated at LE5 to LE8 million.

The bookstore was not sold because of disagreements among the heirs. But plans to hold the auction are well underway, which has caused considerable distress among many Ministry of Culture officials, journalists and the public, who are wondering what will become of the bookshop, the rare works it contains, and the premises on which it is built.

Many blame the *Al-Awqaf* (religious endowments) Authority, affiliated to the Ministry of *Al-Awqaf*, for the uncertain fate the bookshop faces. The Authority is responsible for most of the Islamic monuments in Egypt, but many are questioning its ability to safeguard them, especially in light of the fact that the Authority is entitled to half the sum received from the auction.

Officials at the *Awqaf* Authority plead not guilty, however. They cite a court ruling that the auction be held to sell the contents of the bookshop, which belong to Mohamed Ali Sobeih's heirs.

"The Ministry of *Al-Awqaf* cannot sell a historical site, it can only rent it," maintains Said Mahdi, who is in charge of the Cairo branch of the Authority. "We announced that an auction would be held to sell the contents of the bookshop, which includes rare books and old printing equipment, and to find a new tenant for the place." The new tenant, he quickly adds, has no right to make any changes to the place, not even minor ones.

Adel Ezzat, the Sobeih family's lawyer, explains that the auction will be carried out according to a verdict. "The heirs won a lawsuit entitling them to sell the contents of the bookstore and hand the place over to a new tenant, who will be asked to pay at least LE5 million to the heirs and the Ministry of *Awqaf*, in addition to a monthly rent of LE250, which goes to the Ministry of *Awqaf*."

So who would pay LE5 to LE8 million just for the right to rent a bookstore? The tenant will not own the bookshop, nor be allowed to make any changes to it. Then again, why should the Ministry of *Awqaf* receive half the amount, if it is only organising the auctioning off of books and printers that belong to the heirs? These remain puzzling questions.

Ezzat explains that the bookshop contains a rare collection of books worth LE5 million, a claim quickly refuted by Sherif Sobeih who says the books in question could never be worth that sum of money.

Officials at the Supreme Council for Antiquities, on the other hand, claim they have no authority over the bookshop or the site on which it is built beyond handling restoration work. Ten days before the first auction was due, Minister of Culture Farouk Hosni sent a message from Paris to a ministry official in Cairo to take part in the auction and try to save a historical landmark. Officials at the Council also objected to the sale, and put up a plaque announcing that the place is part of the national heritage. The bookshop is an antiquity that cannot be sold, according to Abdallah El-Attar, a spokesman for the secretary-general of the Supreme Council for Antiquities.

The Ministry of Culture, however, cannot prevent the auction from being held, despite the fact that the site is recorded as an antiquity. The place is owned by the *Awqaf* Authority. Officials there claim to have no choice but to concede to the wish of the heirs, who have obtained an official verdict to sell the books. And all inspectors from Cairo Governorate can do is to ensure that the new owner does not make any changes to the site.



photo: Randa Shaath

"Division of responsibility and lack of coordination among the different authorities are the main reasons behind the loss of our Islamic architectural heritage," says Sabri Nashed, the general manager of museums and exhibitions at the Ministry of Culture.

He cites examples of damage in Fatimid Cairo, the Mohamed Ali Mosque, the Citadel, the streets of Taht Al-Rab' and Al-Muizz Lidin Allah Al-Fatimi. All are inundated with rubbish and vendors. "Our Islamic heritage is literally dying," Nashed says in despair. "Having one authority in charge may yet solve part of the problem."

Officials at the Supreme Council for Antiquities admit that, of 1,200 Islamic antiquities listed in Egypt in 1882, only 498 have survived. "The Council owns at most 10 per cent of the Islamic heritage," El-Attar says. "Ownership should be shifted from the Ministry of *Awqaf* to the Council, which is responsible for maintenance and restoration work."

Nashed suggests that the Ministry of Culture buy or rent Mohamed Ali Sobeih's bookshop directly from the heirs. "We should not allow our history to be sold at auctions in which non-Egyptians may participate."

The heirs agree. "The heirs understand the historical and cultural significance of the place and are ready to sell it to the Ministry of Culture," Ezzat declares. "We have also invited Al-Azhar and the General Egyptian Book Organisation to take part in the auction, but no one has responded so far."

Funds, or the lack of them, have always been a daunting problem when it comes to saving Egypt's architectural heritage. "The government shows special care for our architectural heritage and historical sites," Askar assures, citing the restoration work recently carried out on the homes of Ahmed Shawqi, Taha Hussein and Mahmoud Khalil, and on several mosques and churches. "But the government has limited funds and other priorities, like building schools and hospitals."

Will the government raise the money necessary to save Wikalat Abul-Dahab and other Islamic monuments? Or will the *wikala* end up in the hands of wealthy wholesale book dealers? These are questions yet to be answered.



Party frock

Our first year in Sydney was not exactly a millionaire's holiday. In that respect, we were not very different from thousands of other migrants who were starting over from scratch. Unlike the others, however, my husband considered our cramped financial situation as transitory and was reluctant to acquire the habits of the new poor. Consequently, he sought out old friends who had come before us and quickly worked their way to the top. "No one needs to know that we are having a few passing difficulties," he used to tell me. This meant a great deal of strain, not only on our meagre budget but on our imagination as well, as we tried to keep up with Sydney's cosmopolitan clique. Mostly we managed, as I developed the unsuspected talent of making a little go a long way.

Some situations were tricky, however, and it took more than a touch of creativity to keep up our game. "You don't have to tell our friends that you work," my husband would say crossly when I inadvertently let the information slip. "It is none of their business." Our friends were puzzled, however, when they failed to find me at home in the mornings, and they demanded to know what I did with my time. "Tell them that you are depressed and that you do charity work to occupy your spare time," my husband finally advised. "In an insurance company?" I asked rather doubtfully. He shrugged. "Tell them what you wish, as long as you don't tell them the truth." I did not say anything, and I am sure that the imagination of our good friends must have run wild when they repeatedly found me unavailable for little coffee klatches on week mornings.

My undeservedly tarnished reputation seemed to enhance our social life,1 aever, or at least it certainly did nothing to hinder it. I consistently blackmailed my secretary and begged my neighbours to become unofficial baby-sitters. I racked my brains afterwards to reward them with creative — inexpensive — little gifts.

Inviting their children to weekend poolside barbecues at the homes of some of our more affluent friends, offering to cook exotic dishes for them and baby-sitting or knitting for their offspring on my spare nights were just a few of the ideas I came up with. The rest of the time, I combed the sales at every department store in far-away suburbs for those little numbers which would only cost a few dollars yet smack of *haute couture*. To pay for the costumes and accessories necessary to our charade, I accepted any overtime or extra jobs which came my way.

All I remember from that first year in Sydney is that I went through life in a daze, feeling chronically exhausted. In contrast, my husband was buoyant. He loved the weekends on yachts and in our friends' country houses, and the exclusive men's clubs to which he was constantly asked. In order to return the lavish invitations, he developed a thorough knowledge of the city and its environs, including slaughterhouses and fresh produce wholesale markets where an infinite number of delicacies could be had at little cost. He soon became known for the deliciously original picnic lunches he would whip up and the interesting, out-of-the-way historic or scenic spots he led our friends to.

Other popular venues took place in our tiny apartment, where I woke up at 5am on weekends to prepare *tête-de-veau vinaigrette* and fresh beef tongue salad for our celebrated at-home lunches.

Tragedy, however, was bound to strike, and strike it did, in the form of a black-tie New Year's Eve ball for which neither of us had the adequate accouterment. A little arithmetic quickly demonstrated that attending would deal a mortal blow to our budget, even including a hoped-for New Year's bonus. The tuxedo alone would sink us deep in debt. And there was still the problem of the baby-sitter and my dress. "I'll stay, you go," I told my husband, secretly hoping to finally spend a quiet night with our daughter. "Impossible," he said. "They will want to know why."

All the plausible excuses I came up with did not satisfy him. As the day drew closer, our daughter informed us that she had been invited to spend New Year's Eve with a friend. "Nina said I was to sleep over," she told me proudly, shattering my last hopes of begging out of the event.

I have always found that people who have their backs to the wall come up with the brightest ideas. "Find a tuxedo," I told my husband the following day. "I'll rent an evening gown." At first he thought that having a tuxedo made would be selfish, but I could see that the idea was growing more attractive by the minute.

The next day, he went to the best Italian tailor in Sydney. They became friends and the man not only agreed to whip up the coveted garment in a couple of days, but also to let my husband pay for it in three instalments — for a small premium. It was time to select my own evening disguise. The world of clothing rental appeared as an untapped Ali Baba's treasure trove. For a few dollars, I had a mind-boggling selection at my temporary disposal. It could be that I was carried away in making my ultimate choice, because when we showed up at the mansion on top of the hill, I distinctly heard the guests gasp. "Where did you find this marvel?" someone asked in awe. The distinguished guests shoved each other out of the way to finger the sheer, delicately embroidered material.

With all the hurdles I had been forced to leap over in order to stand where I was standing, decked out in my finery, I had stupidly not anticipated this one. "This? Oh, it's from Egypt," I mumbled vaguely and quickly changed the subject. But good friends are not to be brushed off so easily. As the evening progressed, I was forced to compound my original lie by describing the imaginary circumstances in which the dress had been made. Feeling quite like Cinderella, I answered lots of detailed questions about the bogus maker of the "masterpiece of craftsmanship" which was now adorning my humble back. Unwittingly, I had outshone Sydney's who's who, and I was not about to be let off the hook with a pirouette.

The following morning, having returned the dress to the shop bright and early, I spent the rest of the day answering callers who wanted to copy it. Exhausted, I was seriously thinking of disconnecting the phone when my doorbell rang. The wife of my husband's boss had come over in person to borrow the dress, "before the others get to it," she said. "It's at the cleaner's," was all I could find to say, blushing furiously. She left in a huff, suspecting foul play. I have always imagined that the boss's bankruptcy, announced a week later in the papers, was just a poor excuse to fire my husband in retaliation.

Fayza Hassan

Sufra Dayma

Spicy garlic chicken

Ingredients:
- 1 1/2kg chicken
- 2 medium onions (thinly sliced)
- 1 large red capsicum (diced)
- 1 tsp. crushed garlic
- 1 small bunch coriander (finely chopped)
- 2 tsp. ground coriander
- 2 tsp. ground cumin
- 1 tsp. of each: ground ginger, chilli powder, ground turmeric and finely grated lemon rind.
- 1/2 cup pitted and diced black or green olives
- 1 1/2 cups chicken stock
- Butter
- Salt+pepper+allspice

Method:
Trim chicken of excess fat and sinew. Cut chicken into twelve serving pieces. Heat butter in a large frying pan. Fry chicken in small batches over high heat until well browned. Remove from pan and drain on kitchen paper towels. In another cooking pan, heat butter and add the onions, garlic, capsicum, ginger, chilli, turmeric, coriander and cumin. Stir all ingredients and add green coriander. Cook over medium heat for ten minutes. Add chicken pieces. Stir until combined. Add chicken stock, season, bring to boil, reduce heat and simmer covered until chicken is tender and cooked through. Add olives and rind. Simmer for a further five minutes. Serve with rice and a green salad.

Moushira Abdel-Malek

Restaurant review

Moonlight and muzak

Andrew Steele tells a fishy story

Elegant. One can sum it up in a single word. Rossini is an elegant fish restaurant which lives up to its pretensions. Set in a modern villa in a genteel part of Heliopolis, it boasts a piano bar, a dining area, and a glorious garden. A mock Tuscan garden, if you will, with palms, trellises and lashings of terracotta. What could be better than wrought iron furniture and varnished pine? And were there aromatic herbs burgeoning from the herbaceous border — or was the moonlight fooling with my senses? Perhaps the sonorous syncopation of Henry Mancini was up to no good, as it swathed this most perfect of piazzas with its suave timbre.

No sooner were we seated than the festivities commenced, said festivities coming in the shape of grassini, freshly baked rolls, and a selection of three butters — herb, garlic and plain. I was coarse enough at this point to upturn the elegant porcelain dinner plate that had been set at each place, with a view to purchasing a set for my next dinner party. Made by "Fine Royal" of Egypt, the design was in bold, primary colours and screamed of rural Italy. But no, I thought, savouring a complementary tidbit, I shall hold my next dinner party at Rossini. A goujon of grouper, then, with a light tartar sauce. A suitably palate-whetting prelude to what turned out to be a very fine meal indeed. Not to mention elegant.

For antipasti we indulged in a seafood soup and trilogia di vol au vent. The seafood soup was quite a coup. A delicious fragrant broth, with a twang of plum tomatoes, brim full of shrimps, calamari and grouper pieces. My companion said it was soup to die for. I tasted it and swooned. My trilogy of vol au vents had the distinction of coming in most decidedly home-made flaky pastry shells, one filled with succulent shrimps, another with very smoky salmon and herbs, and the third with what I presume was batarikh, a salty but nice Egyptian fish roe concoction. Full marks all round.

Main course arrived after a decorously timed interlude. My Sogliola Rossini was a simple lemon sole, flawlessly grilled; it fell off the bone and was accompanied by al dente vegetables. My chaperone's Frito Misto de Barca had that same, understated panache, coming, as befits it, in a light, golden batter and with more of that toothsome tartar sauce. Fillets of grouper, jumbo shrimps and whirls of calamari rather echoed the soup in terms of ingredients. Fortunately, the quality was similarly aped.

I was the only one with enough room for dessert, and the room that existed was slight. Consequently, I demurred the Tiramisu, and summoned a sorbet. Foregoing the option of vodka, I found it very lemony, deliciously bitter and rather comfortingly reminiscent of eating snow as a child.

The service throughout our moonlit feast was as graceful and choice as the gastronomic delights that accompanied it. And a bill of LE200 for dinner for two, one dessert, two Stellas and a digestive cup of tea, is a reasonable sum for so exquisite an evening. Not a venue for daily use then, but most certainly a garden of delights.

Rossini, 66 Omar Ibn El-Khattab Street, Heliopolis 2918282

Al-Ahram Weekly

Crossword

By Samia Abdennour

ACROSS
1. Announcing meal (4)
5 Alcoholic large containers (5)
10. Dress edges (4)
14. Mimic (4)
15. Brilliance (5)
16. Reptile's nail (4)
18. Net (5)
19. Misplace (4)
20. Passageways (6)
22. Bakery item (4)
24. Move unexpectedly in hasty manner (3)
25. Clumsy (5)
27. A scaly limbless reptile (7)
29. Fund-raising programme of entertainment organised by students; cast-offs (3)
31. Broadcast (3)
32. Personal pronoun (3)
33. Hail! (3)
34. Sharply evident; desolate (5)
37. Furze (5)
41. King...(4)
43. Heir (3)
44. Hurl with missiles (4)
45. Penetrate (5)
47. Listened (5)
50. Edgar Allan...(3)
51. Target (3)
53. Sedan (3)
54. Pounds, abb. (3)
55. Boarding school communal place, 2 wds. (7)
59. Scoundrel (5)
61. Strange space things, abb. (3)
62. A tailless amphibian (4)
64. Blue pigment obtained from iris or violet (6)
67. Disgusting (4)
69. Freshwater fish (5)
71. A marked trend of opinion or fortune (4)
72. Naval ratings; disliked persons (4)
73. Originate (5)
74. ....of Man (4)
75. Scrutiny; check out (4)
76. Handles of swords (5)
77. Masticate; deliberate (4)

DOWN
1. Senile (4)
2. A precious stone (4)
3. Lacking proper care and attention (9)
4. Unripe (5)
5. Refuse deep hole (7)
6. Expert (3)
7. Tear (4)
8. Japanese syllabaries, pl. (5)
9. Comb. form for "solid" (6)
10. A chemical solution of colourless gas hydrogen chloride, abb. (3)
11. Marry in secret (5)
12. Stone builder (5)
13. Cleaned; rushed through (5)
21. Affirmative votes (4)
23. Shallow oblong garden basket of wood strips (4)
26. Refuse (5)
28. Rigid support (4)
29. A garden tool; a dissolute man of fashion (4)
30. British river (4)
35. Deer (3)
36. An acquired ability for doing a thing adroitly (5)
38. Fill again (9)
39. Coarse, stupid person (4)
40. French summers (4)
42. Tackle or equipment (4)
46. Melee (4)
48. Cattle-breeding establishments (7)
49. Cart without sides for heavy loads (4)
52. A Muslim title given to religious dignitary (6)
55. Quilt (5)
56. Burning (5)
57. Part of egg, pl. (5)
58. A New Zealand aborigine (5)
60. Prophetic or inspired (5)
63. The Lower House of Parliament of the Republic of Ireland (4)
65. Inactive (4)
66. Weather directions (4)
68. Superlative suffix (3)
70. Central Standard Time, abb. (3)



Last week's solution

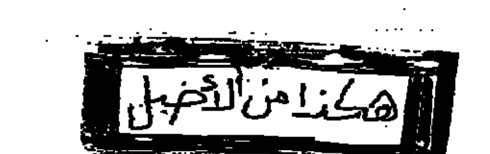




photo: Amoune Albert

From Kasr El-Nil to Zamalek, a Corniche facelift is giving new life to evening strolls by the River Nile, writes **Gihan Shahine**

A breath of fresh air

As the last streaks of an orange sunset linger on the Cairo skyline, the banks of the Nile come to life. Couples and families stroll leisurely, taking in the cool evening air after the suffocating heat of the day. "Spending evenings by the Nile should be a daily routine, to relieve the tension of the day, if anything. It is the only outlet for people like us, with nowhere else to go," says Fathi Mohamed, an accountant from the working-class district of Boulaq. His wife is sitting nearby, munching on a roasted corn cob, while their children play around them. But this is an evening out with a difference. Like hundreds of others, they have chosen to spend it on one of the new Nile-side promenades in Zamalek.

Just a few months ago, walking along the Zamalek Corniche meant battling past an endless line of Nile-cruise restaurants, casinos and five-star cafés freely using the sidewalks as extra terrace space, and hiding the Nile view behind. Spending a pleasant evening by the Nile involved either bracing oneself for the high prices of the cafeterias, or heading for the crowded and noisy Corniche on the other side of the Nile, where any atmosphere of seclusion and intimacy is shattered by the constant roar of traffic.

The days of limited promenade space are hopefully over. The two-stage project to build the riverfront promenade on the east bank of the prosperous district of Zamalek was the brainchild of Abdel-Hadi Radi, the late minister of irrigation and water resources.

The first stage, completed at a cost of LE1.5 million, starts from Qasr El-Nil Bridge and runs 300 metres north. The second stage starts where the first ends, covering the 1,200 metre stretch up to the 15th May Bridge. Costs of the second stage are estimated at LE4 million.

The development of the Zamalek Corniche is also part of a larger plan to reinforce the banks of the Nile from Aswan to Giza, and to improve the river front in 19 villages between Aswan and Beni Suef, creating promenades and parks to give the inhabitants a chance to enjoy the Nile view. The success of the first part of the Zamalek Corniche project has inspired the government to create other promenades in the city, but plans are temporarily suspended due to lack of funds.

The aim of the Zamalek Corniche project is to create a free promenade accessible to all, says Zeinab El-Gharabli, a deputy minister of irrigation and water resources. And so far, it has more than achieved its goal. More park than promenade, seats, green areas, lamp-posts and a mooring for small boats draw crowds of visitors every evening. Vendors are everywhere, selling lupins, corn cobs, peanuts, flowers and children's toys.

Mary Asaad, a member of the Association for the Protection of the Environment, lives in an apartment overlooking the new Corniche, and is happy with the change. "The Corniche becomes a festival ground at night, which I enjoy watching and joining sometimes," she says. "This part of the Nile has long been neglected and filled with garbage. Now it looks civilised. Walkers respect the place and do not leave any garbage in their wake."

Some environmentalists complain, however, that the ministry had to fill up parts of the Nile to build the new promenade. Yet officials assert that this poses no threat to the form of the Nile, insisting that the project was planned according to an environmental study conducted at the site.

"I am totally against filling up parts of the Nile River," says Dr Mohamed Rafiq Abdel-Bary, director of the Nile Research Institute. "But the level of mud was so high in the area and the water was so shallow. Navigation was not viable." He adds that the same measures cannot be taken on other parts of the Corniche, where filling up the Nile could cause an ecological imbalance.

Inhabitants of the nearby areas are holding their breath for the completion of the second stage of the Corniche; but some obstacles persist. Many cruising restaurants along the banks are reluctant to move, but a compromise has been reached whereby the boats will be anchored at right angles to the bank, allowing work to be carried out.

Officials assert that in almost three months, the second stage will be open to the public. With Cairo daytime temperatures soaring and humidity increasing, the collective lung of the congested metropolis will hold out for its long-deserved treat, a breath of fresh air.

Children who make teddy bears

Despite efforts to eradicate child labour, long hours in appalling conditions are a daily reality for millions of Egyptian children. **Fatemah Farag** investigates



photo: Nour Sobeih

"I do these kids a favour" says *Hag* Mohamed, owner of a scrap metal workshop in El-Duweika. "Their families bring them because they were no good at school, and this way they help their families out," he adds, slapping one of "his boys" on the back of the head with a friendly chuckle. *Hag* Mohamed has 10 boys between the ages of 5 and 10 crammed into a small, unventilated and dimly lit room with two extremely noisy metal machines. The boys work 11 hours a day, sorting pieces of metal with their bare hands. They are pale and underweight, with a vacant stare in their eyes, and most have bruises which are only too obvious.

And despite the fervour in the media drawing attention to their plight, the lot of children such as *Hag* Mohamed's workers is not getting any better. It is becoming increasingly evident that child labour is a powerful institution.

In 1988, the Egyptian government declared the years 1989-99 a Decade for the Protection and Development of the Egyptian Child. Yet today, according to official statistics, 5 million children between the ages of 6 and 14 work regular jobs. This figure does not include domestic work or seasonal agricultural and industrial work. Furthermore, there are an estimated 3 million homeless children. One out of three children who enrol in schools drops out during the primary stage.

"I have to work to help my mother," explains 8-year-old Mohamed who works 9 hours a day for LE3 making, ironically, teddy bears. "These bears are for the children whose families are rich," he adds, holding up a white bear with red ears he had just finished.

Mohamed, like thousands of others, works in a small, crowded and poorly ventilated workshop. No agency regulates the conditions of his work, which include long hours, hazardous tasks and abusive treatment. There are no comprehensive statistics regarding this topic, but a study carried out in 1993 on children working in tanneries by Dr Ahmed Abdallah, head of the El-Jil Centre, an NGO research and care centre for child workers, showed that 70 per cent of child labourers covered by the research worked over 8 hours per day. In addition, a UNICEF study published in 1992 indicated that multiple injuries due to unsafe working conditions were not uncommon. Regular press reports on the mistreatment of child workers are an indication of the kind of abuse these children often suffer.

CHILD LABOUR
- POVERTY
- SCHOOL VS WORK
- LAW VIOLATIONS
- BAD CONDITIONS
- SOCIAL CARE

AND WHEN MOZART WROTE HIS FIRST SYMPHONY AT AGE FIVE, WAS THIS WORK OR STUDY?!

The Comprehensive Labour Law, passed on 24 February last year, raising the legal working age from 12 to 14, stipulates that work must not interfere with basic education and should be in shifts of no more than six hours. But this law has not been rigorously enforced.

One reason behind the continued existence of child labour is poverty. As Labour Minister Ahmed El-Amawi put it in a recent TV interview, the Labour and Manpower Ministry could crack down on the phenomenon, but what would happen to the millions of families who depend on their children's income for survival?

A 1997 UNICEF survey shows that 68 per cent of Egyptian families live under the absolute poverty line. The monthly income of one out of two families ranges between LE40 and LE160. "To eradicate the phenomenon, it is not enough to pass a law... you have to deal with the reason why people are forced to make these children work," a bulletin on the law by the Legal Aid Centre for Human Rights stated.

Child labour is cheap. But employers cite other reasons for hiring the young. *Amm* Abduh, the owner of a toy workshop specialised in the manufacture of teddy bears, gives this answer. "Children are much better... they take less [money], are easy to control and don't have many demands... Once a boy reaches 16 or 17 he starts throwing his weight around and becomes more trouble than he's worth."

Several local and international agencies are active in combatting the problem. Over the past few years UNICEF has created several centres specialised in caring for working children in various parts of the country. The El-Jil Centre in the working-class Cairo district of Ain El-Sira also offers health and recreational services to children who work in the area. But the number of children catered for in these services is in the hundreds, a small fraction of the millions of child labourers in the country.

Hosniya's winters

HOSNIYA is a thin, pretty nine-year-old girl who lives with her family of six members in El-Sharqiya Governorate. She lost one of her fingers while working at a cotton gin last year. An estimated 5,000 children nation-wide work the cotton gins. Her family was given LE20 in compensation for the injury, and Hosniya will go back to work again next season.

Five major public sector companies, El-Nil, El-Wadi, Misr, El-Arabia, and El-Delta, run 90 cotton gins nation-wide, which work between the months of October to March. According to Adel William, the author of a study on child labour in this sector, the companies arrange a committee in September to choose labour contractors to bring in workers for the seasonal work at the gins. William said, "Of course, to clinch the deal, the contractors try to offer the lowest price and hence they rely totally on children, who are willing to take the lowest wage... and because the contractor is responsible, the companies are relieved of the responsibility for minors working their machines."

The children themselves are given LE2 a day for an 8-hour shift. The ginning factories work three shifts a day, which also means children are involved in night shifts.

Hosniya explains what her job last year involved. "I had to get up at five to go to a place in the village where the *hag* [the contractor] picked us up in an open van and took us to the factory. They told me to do the same as the kid next to me and so I had to pick up the cotton from the floor and put it in the machine and then move to the next one and do the same." William explains that each child is responsible for 4 machines in a three-metre vicinity, and that they repeat the movements described by Hosniya back and forth for the eight hours with no break. "They let us eat our bread and cheese while working," interjected Hosniya.

Umm Hosniya is upset about the finger her daughter has lost but is determined to send her again. "The factory is good work because it is regular. [The children work seven days a week]. When the factory is not working, the kids work in the fields, but then they may not get work all the time."

William said that most of the children involved in the ginning industry are girls. "Because the work is during the school term... village people who have boys try to send them to get some basic education, but for the girls this is not necessary," he said.

The cotton companies employing children are state-owned," he added "People have the impression that children are only used in the workshops of the private sector or in agriculture... This is not true."

When asked whether she was looking forward to going back to work, Hosniya looked away shyly and mumbled, "It's O.K."

Icons abroad, technology at home

An exhibition of masterpieces from the Monastery of Saint Catherine is currently on display in New York while, as **Rehab Saad** reports, the monks are turning to technology

"Byzantine Art" is the name of an exhibition which includes nine unique icons and manuscripts from Saint Catherine's Monastery in Sinai being held in the Metropolitan Museum, New York. It is the first time any item has been out of the Greek Orthodox monastery, according to Archbishop Damianos. "It was a very hard decision to take. It has long been the policy of the fathers not to let any of the treasures outside the *monastery walls*," he explained.

But finally they realised that participating in the exhibition could be beneficial to the monastery itself which needs funds for conservation and restoration. "This exhibition, which will last until 9 July, might help attract sponsors," Damianos added.

Damianos stressed that the icons had been insured for two million dollars. "Under such conditions, participation in similar exhibitions abroad might be considered again in the future," he declared.

The increasing number of pilgrims and visitors to the monastery is a problem, said Damianos. "We try to regulate their movement but it is not an easy task. Opening hours for the monastery are limited from 9am to noon, except for Orthodox pilgrims who are allowed to attend prayers in the church," he said.

Many solutions to the problem of too many visitors have been suggested. One is to make use of modern technology and the World Wide Web so that the public "can learn all about the monastery without disturbing the place," he said.

In the 1960s most of the manuscripts were microfilmed and copies sent to the Library of Congress in Washington. "Now they are being microfilmed again, using more sophisticated technology," said Damianos. The manuscripts will be stored on a computer database. The monastery has already obtained the necessary equipment and some monks are being trained in its use.

In an effort to conserve the treasures of Saint Catherine, the fathers established the International Saint Catherine Foundation in London last June under the patronage of Prince Charles. "The first task will be to renovate the famous library which is recognised as second in importance to the Vatican's," said Damianos. "The monastery has received some assistance from Greece, and Egypt's Supreme Council of Antiquities but it still needs more for the conservation of icons and manuscripts," he added.


Yachts sailing to Egypt will soon receive better and more efficient services — photo: Sherif Sonbol

Whither blow the winds of change?

A national plan to encourage yacht tourism has already been formulated, yet yachtsmen still find troubled waters in Egypt. **Sherine Nasr** investigates

With 200km of coastlines, challenging seas and a perfect climate, Egypt should be able to promote itself among recreational sailors as one of the world's best sites for yachting. Yet Egypt's share of the estimated $700 billion global market for marine recreation remains very low.

According to Ahmed El-Atrebi, a counsellor at the Tourist Development Authority (TDA), a comprehensive plan was launched in 1994 to study the potential of yachting tourism in Egypt and to determine the sites along the Red Sea and Mediterranean coastlines where marinas can be established.

"Egypt is a great market for sailors from Europe because they can come all year round," said El-Atrebi.

El-Atrebi noted that the number of yacht owners in the Arab countries has also increased significantly. He said, "This is a very promising market. Egypt is less than a half-day sail from these countries and a significant amount of money can be generated by simply providing storage facilities in the different marinas."

The Red Sea, he added, provides yacht owners with unique sailing opportunities. "In addition to favourable weather conditions throughout the year, the Red Sea is very challenging for professional sailors because of its unpredictable currents."

Hassan Luxor, an international yachting referee and member of the International Yachting Federation, believes that "it is just time to promote yachting tourism in Egypt more seriously."

The first of the new marinas under the TDA plan is already under construction. It lies five kilometres south of Sharm El-Sheikh harbour and will accommodate at least 100 boats.

Twenty-five other locations along the Mediterranean and Red Sea coasts have also been chosen, where more marinas will be set up so that by the year 2000, almost 5,000 berthing facilities will be available. "We made sure that the distance between one marina and another is approximately a one-day sail to guarantee a comfortable trip," said El-Atrebi.

Three sites have been chosen as legal entrances to the country: Port Said in the west, Taba in the east and Halayeb in the south. El-Atrebi said that these sites will have passport and customs facilities so that tourists can sail freely into Egyptian waters once they have their papers and yachts checked.

El-Atrebi added, "As integrated marinas, more facilities will also be granted. Yachts using any of the three marinas will usually have been sailing for long distances, so maintenance facilities, accommodation and some recreational activities will be included for those who want to spend the night".

Other spots have been designated for different types of marinas. Suez, Nuweiba and Dahab will serve as pleasure ports and provide post office and communication facilities, while Ismailia, El-Tor and Abu Rudeis will be used as shelters where sailing boats can rest for a few hours.

El-Atrebi emphasised that the new strategy is meant to encourage more recreational packages that combine navigation and site tours. "In this respect there is great potential. Sailors can stop over for the night in Port Said for shopping or dock in Suez and go for a day-visit to St Catherine's. And this means more income," he said.

"The project may bring about solutions for the long-standing problems sailors used to encounter when entering Egyptian waters," Luxor said.

One major problem, according to Luxor, is the lack of facilities. "At present, the services available to yachts coming from long distances are very primitive. In fact, there are no real marinas in Egypt like those in Greece or Turkey, two main competitors to Egypt in this field," said Luxor.

The only services yachts can obtain at the present time are those offered by the yacht clubs in Alexandria, Port Said, Ismailia and Suez and the Marine Sports Club in Sharm El-Sheikh and Hurghada. And these facilities only provide water, fuel and a 24-hour guard.

But as a form of tourism that caters primarily to the wealthy, these services are far from satisfactory. "Yacht owners usually take their boats for a month-long sail. They want the same service they would have if they stayed in a five-star hotel," said El-Aterbi. "Even so simple a service as laundry is lacking: do we expect these people to wash their clothes in the sea?" Luxor quipped.

But it is the bureaucratic inconvenience yacht owners face in Egypt that most scares them away. "Those who venture to enter the country are trapped in a maze of endless procedures," said Luxor. For the most part, yacht owners are not even informed of the costs and customs procedures they face, which vary from one port to another. The only guidelines available are those included in a pamphlet written 17 years ago but never updated.

Moreover, sailors have to deal with various official and legal authorities whose offices are sometimes eight kilometres away from the port. "These complications force yacht owners to turn for help to private agencies who get the papers signed but at an extra cost that varies according to how luxurious the boat looks and how clever a bargainer the owner is," said Luxor. Worse, there are no legal restrictions on these private agencies, so the yacht owner is at their mercy.

These bureaucratic hurdles have kept away a number of amateur sailors from countries such as Thailand and Singapore. "They were surprised to be asked to pay for procedures that were granted complimentary to yachters from other countries in order to encourage the sport," said Luxor.

El-Atrebi believes that many of these obstacles will be overcome once the three legal entrances are established. He is hopeful that the TDA's new plan will herald a new era for yachting enthusiasts and promote one of the most potentially lucrative branches of the tourist trade.


Yuya's features immortalised in gold — photo: Sherif Sonbol

Akhenaten's grandparents get pride of place

The Egyptian Museum is currently undergoing a series of internal improvements that bode well for one of the world's most famous collections. **Nevine-El Aref** reports

With the arrival of summer, concentrated efforts are being made to develop the Egyptian Museum's second floor, and fascinating treasures are seeing the light of day for the first time. And among these, antiquities connected to the family of Akhenaten, (1370-1352 BC), the pharaoh famed for his monotheistic beliefs, are causing a stir.

The mask of Yuya, Akhenaten's grandfather, has been restored and put on permanent display for the first time, beside the mask of Yuya's wife Thuya. A *ba* (soul) bird with a human face is also exhibited in the same showcase.

Yuya's mask, made of cartonage, painted in gold and decorated with semi-precious stones and coloured glass, is one of the most intriguing exhibits in the museum in the opinion of Mohamed Saleh, general director of the Egyptian Museum. Earlier stored in the museum's basement, parts of the right side of the face had deteriorated. Restoration was carried out in the department attached to the museum, aided by an Italian artist and specialist in the restoration of reliefs. He carried out some retouching of the mask but in such a manner as to differentiate between the original parts and the restored sections.

The masks of Yuya and Thuya were discovered in 1905 in a rock-hewn tomb in the Valley of the Kings. As it was considered vitally important to preserve the likeness of the deceased, and because the face of the mummy itself was usually wrapped with linen, it was important to ensure the mask bore an accurate likeness so that the spirit of the dead person, his *ka*, could recognise the person and return to the body at any time. The masks are, therefore, considered actual likenesses of these two important individuals.

Another improvement in the museum is the renovation of the two jewellery rooms, which display royal treasures from the three "great" periods of Ancient Egyptian history, the Old, Middle and New kingdoms.

The aim is to provide a new layout and decoration for both chambers, as well as to install new lighting, ventilation and air-conditioning systems, and specially designed showcases. Both rooms are now temporarily closed, but one will be unveiled in July. "Meanwhile, all the objects have been placed for safe-keeping in the museum's restoration department, where they will be cleaned before being re-exhibited," said Saleh. Items from the same find will be displayed together; the treasure of Dahshur will be put in one showcase, as will the treasure of Tanis, Saqqara, El-Fayoum, Lahun, the Valley of the Kings and Valley of the Queens.

The project, carried out at a cost of LE180,000 is being financed by the museum's budget, together with the donations of Egyptian businessmen.

The Egyptian Museum is currently preparing for a major overhaul of Tutankhamun's collection, in order to upgrade the displays before next November's celebration of the 75th anniversary of the discovery of the tomb by the British archaeologist Howard Carter.

Experts in the field of art, education and museum design from the Dutch Cultural Foundation, and the American Research Centre in Egypt will collaborate to implement the project, scheduled to be completed by November. The two organisations will provide advice on investments in new showcases, suitable lighting and the latest security technology.

ZEIN

Site tours

Buses

Super Jet, East Delta and West Delta buses operate throughout Egypt.

Super Jet

Super Jet stations are located in Almaza (Heliopolis), Tahrir, Giza, Ramsis Street and Cairo Airport. Buses travel to Alexandria, Port Said, Hurghada and Sinai. Tel. 772-663.

Cairo-Alexandria
Services almost every half hour from 5.30am to 10pm, from Tahrir, then Giza, Almaza and the airport. Tickets LE19 until 9pm; LE21 thereafter; from the airport LE24 until 5pm; LE30 thereafter.
A VIP bus with phone access leaves Almaza at 7.15am. Tickets from Almaza LE28; from the airport LE32 each way.

Cairo-Marsa Matrouh
Services at 7am departure and 7pm return from Almaza and Tahrir Square. Tickets LE36.
Cairo-Sidi Abdel-Rahman
Services at 6.30am, 7am, 8am, 9am and 3.45pm. Tickets LE32
Cairo-Port Said
Services every half hour from 6am to 8am; then 9am, 10am, 3pm, and 4.30pm, from Almaza, then Ramsis Street. Tickets LE15 each way.

Alexandria-Port Said
Service 6.45am, from Ramleh Square in Alexandria. Departs Port Said 3.30pm. Tickets LE22 each way.

Cairo-Hurghada
Services 8am and 2pm, from Tahrir, then Giza and Almaza. Departs Hurghada noon and 5pm. Tickets LE40 until 5pm, LE45 thereafter, both each way.

Alexandria-Hurghada
Service 8pm, from Ramleh Square, Alexandria. Departs Hurghada 2.30pm. Tickets LE60 each way.

Cairo-Sharm El-Sheikh
Service 11pm, from Tahrir, then Almaza. Departs Sharm El-Sheikh 11pm. Tickets LE50 each way.

East Delta Bus Company
Buses travel to North/South Sinai
Sinai, Suez and Ismailia. Buses to Ismailia and Suez depart from Qulali (near Ramsis Square), Almaza and Tagnid Square (near Heliopolis). Buses to North and South Sinai depart from the Sinai bus station at Abbassiya Square. Tel. 482-4753.

Cairo-Ismailia
Services every 45 minutes from 6.30am to 6pm, from Qulali, then Almaza and Tagnid Square. Tickets deluxe bus LE5.75; air-conditioned bus LE5.25, one way.

Cairo-Suez
Services every half hour from 6am to 7pm, from Qulali, then Almaza and Tagnid Square. Tickets deluxe bus LE5.75; air-conditioned bus LE5, one way.

Cairo-El-Arish
Services every hour from 7.30am to 4pm, from Qulali, then Almaza and Tagnid Square. Tickets deluxe bus LE21; air-conditioned bus LE13, one way.

Cairo-Sharm El-Sheikh
Services every 45 min. from 7am to 6.30pm from Abbassiya, then Almaza. Tickets morning LE27; evening LE40, one way.

Cairo-Nuweiba
Service 8am, from Abbassiya, then Almaza. Tickets deluxe bus LE31.

West Delta Bus Company

Stations at Tahrir and Almaza. Tel. 243-1846.

Cairo-Hurghada
Services 9am, noon, 3pm, 10.30pm, 10.45pm and 11pm. Tickets LE30 one way.

Cairo-Safaga
Services 9am and 3pm. Tickets LE35 one way.

Cairo-Quseir
Service 10pm. Tickets LE38 one way.

Cairo-Luxor
Service 9am. Tickets LE35 one way.

Cairo-Aswan
Service 5pm. Tickets LE50 one way.

Trains

Trains run to Alexandria, Port Said, Luxor and Aswan, from Ramsis Station. Tel. 147 or 575-3555.

Cairo-Luxor-Aswan
"French" deluxe trains with sleepers
Services to Luxor and Aswan 7.40pm and 9pm (reaching Luxor 6.40 am and 8am, Aswan 8.40am and 10am). Tickets to Luxor LE294 for foreigners and LE129 for Egyptians, to Aswan LE300 for foreigners; LE141 for Egyptians.
"Spanish" deluxe trains without sleepers
Services to Luxor and Aswan 6.45pm, 8.45pm and 9.45pm. Tickets to Luxor: first class LE51; second class LE31. Tickets to Aswan: first class LE63; second class LE37.

Cairo-Alexandria
"Torbini" trains
VIP train: Service 8am. Tickets first class LE32 with a meal; LE22 without a meal.
Standard trains: Services 9am, 11am, noon, 5pm and 7pm. Tickets first class LE22; second class LE17.
"French" trains
Services hourly from 6am to 10.30pm. Tickets first class LE20; second class LE12.

Cairo-Port Said
Services 6.20am and 8.45am. Tickets first class LE45; second class LE26.

EgyptAir

There are between two and five domestic flights daily. Check EgyptAir: Adly 390-0999; Opera 390-2444; or Hilton 772410

Cairo-Aswan
Tickets LE351 for Egyptians, LE1143 for foreigners, both round-trip.

Cairo-Luxor
Tickets LE259 for Egyptians, LE829 for foreigners, both round-trip.

Cairo-Hurghada
Tickets LE279 for Egyptians, LE898 for foreigners, both round-trip.

Cairo-Sharm El-Sheikh
Tickets LE287 for Egyptians, LE945 for foreigners, both round-trip.

Egyptian tourism on the Internet

Here are some useful addresses on the Internet, including tourism magazines, archaeology and travel agency programmes:

http:// www.idsc.gov.eg/links.htm is an address through which you can access other useful tourism addresses on the Internet. Here they are:

http://www.idsc.gov.eg/tourism is the address of Egypt's Tourism Net which provides directories of Egypt's hotels, restaurants, cruise lines, travel agents, transportation companies and tourist attractions. Egypt's tourism net is a part of many home pages (culture, health, environment, etc) created by the IDSC as a part of the nation's Information Highway.

http://163.121.10.41/tourism is the key to Egypt Has it All, where Egypt's tourist sites, such as the Red Sea, Cairo, Luxor, Aswan, the Sinai, Alexandria, oases and ETA offices abroad are described. The magazine also contains colour photographs of Egypt.

http://www.memphis.edu/egypt/egypt.htm is the address of the University of Memphis, and describes their projects in Egypt.

http://www-ceg.ceg.uiuc.edu/~haggag/travel.html is the address of Egypt's Tours and Travel, which organises packages for people who want to take quality tours. It is an Egyptian tour operator, which specialises in tours within Egypt, the Holy Land and the Middle East.

http://www.geocities.com/TheTropics/7210 is the address of The Curse of the Pharaohs. It includes photographs of ancient tombs and temples.

http://www.asy.be/horses is the address of The Arabian Horse Worldwide Guide. This guide aims to promote the world's most beautiful and versatile horse — the Arabian.

http://intercax.com/egypt is a 2,000-page magazine, published by the Ministry of Tourism, where all Egyptian tourist sites are listed and described.
http://watt.seas.virginia.EDU/~aoa5u/city is the address of the magazine *Cairo Scene*, Cairo's first on-line art and entertainment guide. It is the most up-to-date source on where to go and what to do in Cairo. It has also sections for books and the latest CD's besides proposed places to visit like Wadi Rayan.
http://watt.seas.virginia.EDU/~aoa5u is the site of Exodus Egypt, a daily site covering home news including political, social and cultural events.

Sunny summer deals

Hotels and travel agencies are offering special prices for summer. *Prices are valid for Egyptians and foreign residents*

Travel agencies

Sabel Travel is offering trips to Europe and the USA as of July. Trips to Paris go for LE2,700 including accommodation in three-star hotels, breakfast included, as well as internal transportation and sightseeing tours.

Another 15-day trip combines Paris and London for LE4,750 including accommodation in three-star hotels. A 14-day trip to the USA costs LE7,900 including visits to Los Angeles, Las Vegas, Orlando and Miami. The price includes accommodation and internal transportation.

Falcon Travel offers special prices until 30 June including flight tickets, accommodation and sightseeing tours. Trips are scheduled for Tunisia, Antalya and Istanbul. Prices are LE1,700, LE999 and LE1,299 respectively.

Hotels

Cairo
Semiramis Inter-Continental is offering a double room for LE120, including a breakfast buffet, free access to the health club, the jacuzzi, sauna and swimming pool. If the client stays for three nights, he will get the fourth free. The offer is valid until 20 July and subject to availability.

Pyramids Park Hotel, an Inter-Continental global partner resort, is offering a single room for LE160 and a double for LE180 including service fees and taxes, 20 per cent discount on all food items, free shuttle bus to city centre and free use of the exercise room. Prices are valid until October.

Sonesta Hotel Cairo is offering double rooms for LE220 and singles for LE200 including breakfast and taxes.

Fayed
Helnan Morgan Fayed is offering special prices from 20 May to 31 July. The offer includes LE85 per person in a double room including breakfast, services and taxes.

South Sinai
Helnan Dahab is offering a double room for LE99 per person including the breakfast buffet, services and taxes. If the client books a room he can get another one free, breakfast included. The offer lasts until 30 June.

Sharm El-Sheikh Inter-Continental Resort and Casino is offering single rooms for LE160 and doubles for LE190. The offer is valid through June and July and subject to availability.

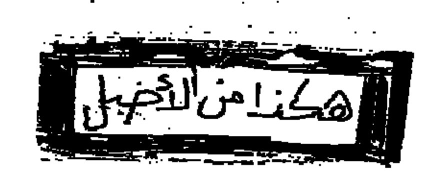
Sonesta Beach Resort Sharm El-Sheikh is offering a rate of LE260 for double rooms and LE190 for single rooms including breakfast, taxes and services.

Red Sea
Helnan Regina Hotel Hurghada is offering rooms for LE120 per person on a half-board basis. The offer is valid until the end of June.

Hurghada Inter-Continental Resort and Casino is offering single rooms for LE160, doubles for LE190 and villas for LE1,100 including the breakfast buffet, complimentary gifts and discounts. The offer is valid throughout June and July and subject to availability.

Sonesta Beach Resort Hurghada is offering a rate of LE266 for double rooms and LE210 for singles on half-board basis including taxes and service charge.

Compiled by **Rehab Saad**



Fulfilling a father's dream

Raouf Abdel-Karim was a young gymnast with lots of talent and little fame. The Mediterranean Games made him a star. **Eman Abdel-Moeti** looks at the life and career of the young champion, and examines the future of the sport in Egypt

It's been years since an Egyptian gymnast shone on the international scene. But now one man, Raouf Abdel-Karim, has put the country back on the gymnastics map with a surprise gold medal at the Mediterranean Games in Bari.

Like many champions, Raouf started early in his sport. His father, Abdel-Karim Abdel-Raouf, was a gymnast who had failed to become an international champion, and, in the classic model of vicarious living, decided that his son would fulfil the dreams he himself was never able to realise. At the age of four, Raouf was entrusted into the hands of Abdel-Raouf El-Hagrassy, a coach at the Cairo Sporting Club.

Fulfilling someone else's dream is a heavy responsibility, but luckily Raouf grew up loving his sport, and willingly sacrificed every moment of free time to training. The years of toil were to pay off when he won six gold medals in his debut in the Arab Championships in 1994 in Cairo. He didn't do so well in the 1995 All Africa Games in Zimbabwe, winning one silver and a bronze. In the African Championships in Namibia the same year, however, he won three gold medals, one silver, and one bronze. And then came Bari.

Bari might never have been, however, if federation officials had had their way. "At first federation officials hesitated to let Raouf participate at Bari because they doubted his ability to win a medal. He was competing against strong gymnasts from France, Spain and Italy," commented Mohamed Demerdash Touni, head of the delegation at Bari. But Raouf's performance in training convinced them to let him go — he had scored an outstanding 9.430 points in the vault.

He was haunted by bad luck in the period leading up to Bari, injuring his toe landing in the vault in the qualifying rounds. Landing after the vault is a move he had practised many many times. But on the day of the competition, he only managed to land standing correctly twice.

Abdel-Hamid Abdel-Mohsen, a former gymnast who accompanied Raouf to the Games commented: "He was the only gymnast to represent Egypt in Bari. It was too much pressure for him to handle. Other countries had teams of five gymnasts, but Raouf was totally on his own." Abdel-Mohsen stayed with Raouf the whole time, trying to boost his self-confidence and stop him from panicking.

"I'd never felt so scared in my life and I hope I won't have to face this situation again. I was under a lot of pressure," Raouf said.

Another gymnast had been due to accompany Raouf, but he had had to pull out because of a back injury.

"I consider Raouf's gold medal both a natural result and a miracle," said El-Hagrassy. "It was the natural result of the player's talent, determination and hard work, and long hours of training over the past 14 years, but it was also a miracle because of the amount of pressure he was under as Egypt's only gymnast, and because the sport is generally neglected in Egypt."

Officials at the Egyptian Gymnastics Federation acknowledge that complaints of underfunding have been heard so often from sports federations that they have become a cliché. But they insist that, in their case, underfunding is the real cause of Egypt's uninspired performance.

"Our budget is only LE300,000 a year, while one piece of apparatus costs at least LE600,000," said Wagdi Abul-Maati, head of the Egyptian Gymnastics Federation. The national team currently trains at the Maadi Olympic Center, the only centre in Egypt which has all the necessary equipment. "The players have been training there for four years without any international competition, because of lack of money," he added.

According to Mohamed Demerdash Touni, head of the Egyptian delegation in Bari, the situation is a little more complicated. "The federation got half its budget before the Mediterranean Games, but it didn't help because it only came two weeks beforehand. If the money had come earlier it could have been used to send the team to international competitions abroad months before the Games," he said.

"If we haven't had international champions in gymnastics since 1963 it isn't because we don't have any talent but because no attention is paid to gymnastics anymore," commented Soliman Hagar, secretary of the Egyptian Olympic Committee.

The federation's El-Arabi Shamoum traced the history of Egypt's achievements in the Mediterranean Games. In 1951, in Alexandria, Egypt won three golds, one silver, and four bronzes. In 1955 in Barcelona, one gold, five silvers, and two bronzes. In 1959 in Beirut, seven golds, three silvers, and five bronzes.

Federation officials announced at a press conference last Saturday that they had agreed with the Belarussian team coach that Raouf would train with the Belarussians for a month.

Hagar affirmed the importance of international competition in confidence building. "I have seen gymnasts panic and fail to do the moves they perform every day in training because they were unnerved by the audience and the tense atmosphere of a major championship," he said. "We should send more of our players to compete abroad so that they build up self-confidence, and break down the walls of fear that make them freeze in major competitions."

This will be Raouf's second training trip to Belarus. Despite the budgetary problems, the federation managed to send him and his teammate on a previous week's training in the ex-Soviet republic. And, determined to give other gymnasts the same opportunity as Raouf, the federation will send the gold medalist and others to Greece for training. They will then participate in the Turkish Open from 11-14 August, followed by a training camp in France and finally the World Championships in Switzerland at the end of August.

Raouf's Russian coach Alexander Ivanov warned against expecting too much of Raouf in the World Championships. "We should not expect a gold medal," he said. "Raouf competed against four strong countries in the Mediterranean Games: France, Spain, the Ukraine, and Russia. At the World Championships there will be other countries which are just as strong, including Japan, China, the USA, and Belarus."

"If Raouf manages to be one of the best eight in the World Championships, that will be considered a major achievement, an even bigger achievement than Bari," agreed federation official El-Arabi Shamoun. "Raouf won the gold medal on the vaulting horse with 9.225 points at Bari. In order to win the gold at the World Championships, he would need at least 9.800 points."

Hagrassy also warned against the damage that could be caused by excessive public pressure on the young gymnast. "It takes years and years to develop a gymnast," he said. "When he begins competing abroad, his performance is bound to be unstable as he tests his skills against world champions. He then deals with his faults and develops his abilities until his performance stabilises, and at that point he can start reaching for the top."

Raouf himself comes across as a modest, yet confident, young man. "I would like to thank everyone who gave me the opportunity to prove to Egypt that we can produce world champions, and that gymnastics is a sport that is worthy of more funding and attention," he said.

Meanwhile, the Olympic Committee's Hagar is looking towards the Sydney Games. He said that Egypt's Olympic Committee is working on the promotion of individual sports, including gymnastics, based on a plan to sponsor talented athletes. With this guidance programme in action, gymnastics could yield 33 medals, he believes. "Egypt could have more talented gymnasts like Raouf if they were well taken care of," he said. "Don't ask me what we have prepared for the World Championships this year, ask me what we are doing now to have a good team in Sydney."



Biting mad

IN A BIZARRE rematch for the World Boxing Association Heavyweight title last Saturday, Mike Tyson was disqualified after three rounds for twice biting Evander Holyfield's ear, resulting in Holyfield's retention of the title of world heavyweight champion, according to Reuters news agency. Holyfield becomes the only man other than Mohamed Ali to be three-time world heavyweight champion.

Boxing fans came to Las Vegas and television sets from all over the world were tuned in to watch what was supposed to be the world's best boxing. But what they witnessed was brutal streetfighting and the most incredible — almost surreal — sights in boxing history.

The trouble started in the second round when a cut opened over Tyson's right eye following a clash of heads, which the referee ruled "an unintentional head butt". Tyson claimed that he was butted several times with no warnings being given to Holyfield.

This made the ex-champion come out fighting mad in the third round, landing several left hooks aimed at clinching a chance to avenge himself over Holyfield. But with 33 seconds left in the third round, the fighters became entangled and Tyson, having somehow got rid of his mouthpiece, reached his head over Holyfield's shoulder and sank his teeth into the champ's right ear, actually tearing a piece off. Tyson followed Holyfield, who was retreating as blood gushed from his ear, and pushed him in the back.

Incredibly, the doctor who examined Holyfield announced that the Van Goghesque fighter could box on. The referee deducted two points from Tyson and the bout continued.

However, although Tyson had been warned that he would be disqualified if he bit his rival again, he had apparently lost control of himself. At his next clash with Holyfield, he once again resorted to a molar-incisor combination, but this time on the champion's left ear. This time referee Mills Lane stopped the fight.

Dozens of police officers and security guards poured into the ring to keep both sides apart as Tyson had to be restrained from going after Holyfield's corner. As both fighters left the ring moments later, Holyfield was cheered and Tyson was booed roundly. After 10 minutes of consultation between the referee and judges, the official result was announced to a chorus of boos: Tyson was disqualified.

Holyfield's trainers denounced Tyson's unprofessional act, calling for severe punishments ranging from a large fine to a permanent revocation of Tyson's boxing licence. Reuters quoted Holyfield's trainer Don Turner as saying after the fight, "That was a real bad thing that happened, that was a real bad thing."

Meanwhile, Tyson complained that he was being unfairly head-butted and had to defend himself. Reuters reports that after the fight Tyson declared, "I can't continue getting butted like that, I got to retaliate."

Holyfield was taken to the hospital following the bizarre turn of events. He will undergo plastic surgery to reattach a section of the top of his right ear that was somehow salvaged from the canvas. The champ earned at least $30 million for the fight, which ought to cover the costs of the procedure.

The last match between the two pugilists took place seven and a half months ago, when Holyfield stunned the boxing world by brutalising Tyson and stopping the once-invincible Mike Tyson in the 11th round. Holyfield's victory this week has cemented his status as the dominant heavyweight of the 1990s.

(photo:Reuters)

Chaos reigns in Egyptian football

Egypt's failure to qualify for the 1998 World Cup in France, is just the start of the national team's problems. **Abeer Anwar** investigates

Egyptian football is having a hard time. Criticism of the national team, its new coach, Mahmoud El-Gohary, and the chaos within the Egyptian Football Federation (EFF) is widespread.

The players' recent weak performances, culminating in the loss to Morocco in the qualifying match for the World Cup last week, has angered fans, officials and football experts. "It is as if they do not want to qualify for the World Cup. They show complete carelessness and lose easy matches," commented Saleh El-Wahsh, a football veteran.

The Morocco game, which was regarded as an easy match, was Egypt's only hope of reaching the World Cup. But the players appeared tired on the pitch and fans began to criticise El-Gohary's training of the team.

"People hung their hopes on me, but I am not a God who can revive the national team in an instant. All I ask for is some time for reformation," Mahmoud El-Gohary said.

When El-Gohary first took over as coach four months ago people believed he would revive the Egyptian team and lead it to the World Cup. Now, however, criticism of his plans and tactics is rife and may force El-Gohary to resign.

The scenario of chaos continues at the EFF which is being weakened by in-fighting between members. In an attempt to solve the problems, the Supreme Council for Youth and Sports (SCYS) has ordered that a meeting of the general assembly to elect EFF members be brought forward from 15 August to 11 July.

This has angered current board members who hoped to improve their image and hold onto their positions by qualifying for the African Nations Cup before the elections.

But the Supreme Council for Youth and Sports said holding the general assembly in August would clash with preparations for the Juniors World Cup in September and that tension within the EFF could affect results. "It is an important event that all Egyptians are looking forward to and we want to work in a quiet atmosphere," explained Abdel Moneim Emara, administrative manager of the SCYS.

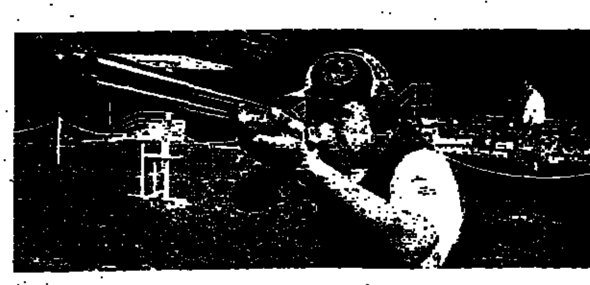
In its last session, the EFF suspended Egypt and Ahli's defender, Ibrahim Hassan, from national, Arab and African games for a year and fined him LE10,000 for making an obscene gesture during the Egypt-Morocco match. In addition, the emergency committee at the EFF suspended him for life from international meetings. "It is an obscene action that affects the image of Egyptian players," commented El-Siagy, deputy head of the EFF.

Thirty-year-old Hassan argued that the Morocco fans were burning the Egyptian flag in the stands and throwing stones and bottles at the team. The referee had not sent him off or given him a yellow card, Hassan added.

But Samir Zaher, head of the EFF, said that such action could not pass unpunished — especially as it was not the first time that Hassan had behaved badly in matches — and that players should know their limits.

Bullseye for Hamdi

Egypt's marksman Mustafa Ismail Hamdi won the gold medal in the skeet event at the Arab Shooting Championships in Cairo, setting a new Arab, African and Egyptian record. **Inas Mazhar** reports



Two days of tough competition between Egypt's Mustafa Hamdi and the Kuwaiti world skeet champion, Abdallah Al-Rashid, at the Arab Shooting Championships in Cairo, ended with Hamdi walking away with the gold medal, having scored 124-125, and 148-150, breaking the world champion's previous record of 123/125, 147/150. Hamdi's performance makes him the new Arab, African and Egyptian record holder. Hamdi, aged 25, also overpowered his Egyptian veteran teammates Mohamed Khorsheid and Khaled Thabet.

Khaled Thabet drew with Al-Rashid and Fahd El-Dihani behind Hamdi with a score of 122-125. The three played a knockout tournament to decide the bronze and silver medals, which ended with Al-Rashid in the silver position, and El-Dihani in third place.

The newly-crowned champion looked as though he could hardly believe what had happened to him. "I am really glad of my victory," he said. "I still cannot believe it, even though I've been shooting with the gold medal as my target. I trained hard for this event, and here I am, winner of the gold. I just hope I will be able to add the gold medal at the forthcoming Arab Games in Lebanon to my collection. But the competition will be harder there — I doubt if El-Rashid will surrender twice without a fight."

Hamdi's first major championship medal was at the All African Games in Zimbabwe in 1995, where he won a bronze. This was followed by a silver medal at the Arab Championships in Jordan in 1995.

Hamdi surprised observers by setting a new Egyptian record of 122-125 at the World Cup in Germany last July, putting him in seventh place. His performance got him a place at the Atlanta Olympics, but he failed to win a medal or even equal his own record.

"Shooting needs deep concentration. I had an argument with a member of the delegation the night before the competition, so I lost my concentration and wasn't able to equal my record. It wasn't because my level had deteriorated. It was a matter of nerves and concentration," he explained.

Wahib Abu Seif, president of the Egyptian Shooting Federation believes that Hamdi has a great future ahead of him. "His achievement is really outstanding," he said. "He is still young, and has his whole future ahead of him. He is very talented and if he continues at the same level he may become a world champion. He could also win an Olympic medal."

What Hamdi really needs, Abu Seif said, is more international experience. "This is the only way he can continually improve his level. But in order to fulfil this he needs a sponsor to nurture him."

A sponsor may be at hand. Hamdi works for the Pyramids Advertising Agency, part of the Al-Ahram Organisation. After this achievement, the organisation is seriously thinking of helping its employee with sponsorship.

Edited by **Inas Mazhar**



Marie Asaad:

It's not "the poor", it's "the people". And she won't let you forget it

No nonsense

If you're looking for Marie Asaad, don't try to find her at home — she's hardly ever there. Try her at an FGM Combat Task Force meeting, or up on the Muqattam with the garbage collectors, or maybe out in a village or urban slum at an NGO seminar about how to implement people-centred community development. Guided by compassion and a sense of social justice, Marie Asaad has dedicated over half a century — 61 years, to be precise — of her life to community work.

It seems strange, however, that a woman born into an upper-class Cairene family has such an affinity with the poor and marginalised. "You have to go through oppression, to know compassion," sighs Asaad. She got her fair dose of the former at a young age. To have been the fourth girl in a traditional family in the 1920s is not an enviable position, but it was her status in the family that really turned her into the fighter she is today. To begin with, she was born the wrong sex — having had three girls, her parents were hoping for a boy — a fact of which she was constantly reminded. "I was unwanted, and so I had to struggle to hold my ground." This was no easy task. Although Marie's father was alive, "it was really my mother who was the boss, she and my maternal grandmother were in control."

And it was just bad luck for Marie when her older sister opted for the cloister. The Bassilis, a stout Coptic family, were devastated when one of their daughters decided to become a nun in a Catholic order. Her mother blamed it on her Catholic schooling, and decided that, unlike her older sisters, whose first schooling years were spent at the prestigious Mère de Dieu, Marie was to be sent to a public school. "In those days, public schools were really bad, but I stuck with it, worked hard, and got top marks."

So, like her older sisters this time, she was then sent to the American College for Girls for her secondary education. In 1936, aged 14, Marie got her first taste of community work by participating in school camps for illiterate children. Unlike the average adolescent, Marie spent her school holidays gathering the village children around her family home in the Delta to teach them how to read and write. A full programme was devised, with sweets, treats and prizes to be given at the end of Marie's summer camps — that, if she wasn't at the YWCA, where she threw herself into organising activities and mobilising the children at camp.

"I will never forget the first time I attended a YWCA camp for teachers and supervisors from the Ministry of Education and they just wanted to sit there and do nothing all day. I used to go and cry in my room because I would suggest that we do this or that and they used to stare at me and then say: 'Ah, isn't she a cute little baby'. I was always quite small and looked younger than my age. I was 21 then, but I probably looked 16. That killed me."

By 1945, Marie Asaad had completed her second BA, having finished the first in 1944. She was the first AUC graduate to have two degrees, "so I had a baa-baa in the end," she laughs. She emerged from the relatively isolated world of the American University at the end of the second world war, and found herself in the middle of a crisis: an outbreak of tuberculosis. "There were many cases of TB. I joined an association which helped the families of TB patients. We were responsible for reaching out to families, getting in touch with them to reassure them about the condition of their family member in hospital. I remember one time, I was given the address of a family whose child was at the TB hospital and I took the tram and reached my destination. I kept searching for hours for the address and I still couldn't find it, so at last I knocked on one of the doors and I showed the man who opened it the address. He laughed at me and told me that the address I had was at the cemeteries. Just think, as early as the 1940s we had people living in the cemeteries."

Meeting women in their homes and talking to them about their problems and experiences convinced Marie more and more of the need for the enhancement of women's conditions. It was much later, in the late 1960s, that she seized the opportunity of working with the AUC Social Research Centre on a project related to family planning centres. This gave her a chance to start her own independent research on female circumcision — more accurately known as female genital mutilation (FGM).

Such an early awareness of the suffering undergone by many women at the hands of midwives or barber-surgeons was the result of shock therapy. In 1952, Asaad attended the Women's Commission meeting in Geneva. At one closed meeting, "there was a discussion of those 'savage, primitive' countries which mutilate their girls. I was shocked at the way they were describing female circumcision. I knew that it was done in Egypt. I also knew that I grew up with the fact that I was the black sheep of the family, and the only one that was not circumcised, because I was a neglected girl. I knew that I would not get married because I was not circumcised."

Returning to Egypt from Geneva, Asaad discovered the deep rift existing between circumcised and uncircumcised women: "Those who were circumcised took it for granted that everybody else was... and those who were uncircumcised could not believe that anybody could go through it." When she started talking about it, she was considered insane. Besides, everybody told her, there were more important things to tackle.

In 1974, her husband died; in 1976, her friends signed her up for a World Health Organisation scholarship — without her knowledge. She was accepted, and took off for Dexter University, where she carried out more research on reproductive health and female circumcision. In 1978, a friend called her to say "Hoda Badran, at UNICEF [at the time], is looking for a person to write a paper on FGM. This is your chance to get your study published." That is how Marie Asaad came to write the first paper in Egypt on FGM from the women's perspective — which was significant in that all the existing material on the subject was written from a purely medical point of view.

In 1994, she became the coordinator of the non-governmental organisation known as the FGM Combat Task Force. Her job is hardly easy, especially in light of recent developments. But Asaad is not fuming about last week's court decision to revoke Minister of Health Ismail Sallam's decree banning the operation in public and private medical institutions. She is quite calm, on the contrary: "I was not surprised. We could read the signs of the times. We could see that this is very much in line with many court decisions that are taking place now... Fundamentalism is not just about violence and terrorism. Fundamentalism has crept into the minds of the people."

Asaad is disenchanted with the lack of support on the part of many intellectuals and doctors for rigorous measures to eliminate the practice. She is convinced that, even if the minister of health appeals, it is likely that the ruling (when it eventually comes out) will not be in his favour. "I am not mobilising action at this level [government], I am mobilising at the grassroots level, so that we can pass on good scientific knowledge to women, and so that they do not ask 'why didn't you tell us, why didn't you share this information with us?'."

Mistakes, she admits, have been made in tackling FGM as a political or religious issue, and now the question of addressing it in simple medical terms is being reappraised. "We are mobilising NGOs in an effort to de-emphasise the health hazards that are associated with malpractice... One woman may have hemorrhaged, but another went to a doctor. For one woman who experienced pain, another was under anesthesia. If one had complications in child delivery, hundreds of other women had normal child deliveries. So we concentrate on how vital this part is to a woman's well-being."

Asaad is not fond of shock tactics, nor is her language especially clinical. She will support whatever works, and whatever prevents the damage from being done. She believes that a crucial role could be played by government-sponsored messages making it clear that the practice is a form of violence against women, and that "we have been living under an illusion for thousands of years, but now we know better about the function of this part in a woman's body."

Asaad, although single-minded, has not restricted her activism to one arena. It is, in fact, for her work with the garbage-collectors of Muqattam that she is perhaps best known. Here, too, she sought to work with the most marginalised, but she wanted to do it differently. Although Asaad started off by reaching out to Mother Emmanuelle, the nun who started a dispensary and school there, she soon realised that Mother Emmanuelle's approach was "very much charity-oriented. She used to call the *zabbalin 'les pauvres'* [the poor, but also 'those poor things'], while I was very much development-oriented and believed in the community's right to participate in the decision-making process."

Through the APE (Association for the Protection of the Environment), Asaad targeted the most vulnerable groups, "who happened to be the young teenage women. They were also the most receptive to change." While Asaad dedicated at least a decade to working with the *zabbalin*, she holds no formal titles, although she is commonly known as the director of APE for Muqattam.

Much of Asaad's time is spent recruiting volunteers and networking with NGOs but she laments the degeneration of volunteerism in Egypt today compared to when she first started out in the 1930s. "Don't tell me there are volunteers. There are few true volunteers... we have to improve the image of volunteerism, it is not because you are a volunteer that you are second class."

Asaad deplores the commercialisation of community development today. "We can all become expert developers and get money from here and there," she says scornfully. The charity mentality of the old days is not necessarily the answer, she argues, but professionalism should not obliterate the spirit of benevolence, which was characteristic of non-governmental work when she began.

At 75, Asaad knows her step-children's grandchildren, and her own children's children, but she still has enough stamina for many more good years of community work.

Profile by ***Mariz Tadros***

Pack of Cards

by Madame Sosostris

♥ This, dears, has been my artistic week. Having abandoned my party-going friends for a bit, I donned my paint-stained apron and balanced my beret at a rakish angle, then went gallery hopping. And what better place to start than the Cairo Opera House, where **Mohamed Maged Abaza** had kindly invited me to attend the inaugural reception of **Mohamed Rizk's** long-awaited exhibition? There is something particularly uplifting about attending artistic events at the Opera House. I find it lends gradeur to the venue. In this particular case, however, grandeur was inherent to the exhibits, a fact I had ample time to observe, once Minister of Culture **Farouk Hosni** and **Nasser El-Ansari**, chairman of the National Cultural Centre, had finished introducing the artist and giving him much deserved praise.



